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THE QUEST FOR WHOLENESS

IN THE POETRY OF

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Quest for Wholeness in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti submitted by Winona C. Scoffield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines several recurrent image patterns in the works of Christina Rossetti, and attempts to demonstrate the way in which they bear upon a theme which is of far-reaching significance in her poetry: the quest for wholeness or self-integration.

The first chapter examines in particular the way in which sea imagery often serves as a medium for revealing different attitudes toward the self. The ocean, in its variety, can suggest that which is mysterious, beautiful, awe-inspiring about the self, or, conversely, that which is threatening, dark, uncontrollable and perhaps irredeemable. And the sea, with its secret depths and boundary shore, is related as well to experiences of freedom and restraint, solitude and self-transcendence.

In the second chapter, imagery of betrothal and marriage is considered. Marriage is seen to be a symbol of wholeness which implies a healthy relation to the world beyond the self, and divorce or broken faith, a metaphor for self-division. The longed-for union, whether of human lovers, fairytale prince and princess, or earthly bride and Heavenly Bridegroom, appears to be impossible as long as the cleavage in the self persists and "heart" is set against "soul". An examination of a positive variation of the marriage motif in "Maidensong" concludes Chapter II.

The final chapter concentrates on the sister poems, and expands upon ideas raised in Winston Weathers' article "The Sisterhood of Self" (Victorian Poetry III, 81-89). Here the development of Rossetti's use of the sisterhood motif as a means of setting forth and sometimes resolving intra-psychic conflicts is traced, and in a closing section "Goblin

Market" is studied as Rossetti's most successful treatment of the theme of self-integration.

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INTRODUCTION

To claim for Christina Rossetti the sort of greatness which we associate with the most celebrated poets of English literary history would be inappropriate. Her reputation has undoubtedly suffered a considerable decline since her own day, although there are signs that she may be about to enjoy a new wave of interest and revaluation in the world of scholarship. In an age when the status of writers like Tennyson and Arnold is far from stabilized, it is next to impossible to assess finally the place of a lesser poet like Rossetti.

In certain obvious respects Rossetti falls short of greatness. She lacks the openness, the intellectual adventurousness of an Arnold; the imaginative vigour of Browning is not a characteristic of much of her work; her name is not attached to any major work of the proportions of Tennyson's In Memoriam. Some readers have called her morbid and too full of self-pity, and it cannot be denied that some of her hundreds of poems invite such castigation. And her rigid adherence to religious orthodoxy creates a barrier for many modern readers, as does her narrowness of interests.

By all accounts Rossetti was an instinctive or intuitive poet rather than a conscious and deliberate artist. She seldom polished or revised extensively. For the greater part she wrote in response to inner promptings and on very personal subjects, matters close to her own heart, and she was loathe to alter her verses from the form in which they had originally come to her, even when advised to do so by her brother Gabriel whose literary judgements she deeply respected. Despite the spontaneity

of her work, however, her craftsmanship is far from slipshod, and the singing quality of her poetry, her ear for rhythms and word music, has rightly met with high praise, both in her own day and in more recent time.

Further to her credit, is one quality of greatness which is unmistakably evident in her work. Simon Lesser has discussed this particular characteristic of great imaginative writing in his Fiction and the Unconscious:

The characterizations, the value systems of great literature . . . are all pervaded by what I like to think of as "a sense of the opposite". The underlying attitude is one of poise and sustained ambivalence.¹

Just such a sense of the opposite, residing perhaps in the manifest emotional complexity of the personality which shaped the poetry, has fascinated Rossetti critics through several generations, all the way from her near-contemporary Edmund Gosse to her most recent biographer Lona Mosk Packer. Gosse, Battiscombe, Evans, Woolf and Packer all remark upon a particular paradoxical quality in Rossetti. Choosing slightly different words, all draw attention to the poet's unique and characteristic fusion of "sensual Pre-Raphaelite intensity",² her "hold upon physical beauty and the richer parts of nature",³ with rigorous Anglo-Catholic asceticism.

Edmund Gosse and Virginia Woolf find in this unabashed presentation of seemingly incongruous elements and attitudes, evidence of a touching emotional honesty, a repudiation of any form of literary hypocrisy.⁴ Woolf speaks of "the pressure of a tremendous faith" which "circles and clamps together" Rossetti's poems. She then goes on to suggest some of the counterbalancing elements which render Rossetti's poetry impure, with all the favorable implications that that term has

assumed since its use by Warren⁵ in his famous essay on "pure" and "impure" poetry:

Death, oblivion, and rest lap round your songs with their dark wave. And then, incongruously, a sound of scurrying and laughter is heard. There is the patter of animals' feet and the odd guttural notes of rooks and the snufflings of obtuse and furry animals grunting and nosing. For you were not a pure saint by any means. You pulled legs; you tweaked noses. You were at war with all humbug and pretence. Modest as you were, still you were drastic, sure of your gift, convinced of your vision.⁶

Upon reading Rossetti's poetry, I found my own interest first excited by the seeming emotional contradictions, the polarities and tensions there displayed, often without the apparent intellectual sophistication of more conscious artists in the twentieth century who have come to regard ambiguity as almost an end in itself. In finding a specific focus for my study, I am indebted to the insights of Winston Weathers whose article, "The Sisterhood of Self"⁷ reveals the manner in which the recurrent images of sisterhood in Rossetti's poems form part of a myth of self-integration which he perceives to be of considerable significance in the body of her poetry. In concluding his article he suggests a direction which future Rossetti studies might profitably take: he wishes to see the sister motif examined further, and related to certain other recurrent motifs such as the broken betrothal, and "voices from the dead". As Chapters II and III of my treatment bear witness, these hints furnished a jumping-off place for my own investigation of several image patterns which upon closer examination show themselves undoubtedly to be variations on the theme of the complex self and the longing for re-unification of the fragmented personality.

Woolf, quite understandably, speaks of Rossetti's religious

strivings as a "knot of agony and intensity at the centre" from which "everything in Christina's life radiated",⁸ and believes the pressure of faith to be the unifying force gathering and "clamping together" her songs. From a rather different view I should suggest that, deeply as her religious values and beliefs colour many of Rossetti's poems, the quest for wholeness, the urgent longing for a true harmonizing of the disquietingly divergent claims of a cloven self, is a thread which links together lyric and narrative, nursery song, love sonnet and prayer, and in its profundity transcends the sometimes distorting dichotomy of the sacred and the secular.

I

PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF: DEEP SEA AND BOUNDARY SHORE

Why does the sea moan evermore?
Shut out from heaven it makes its moan,
It frets against the boundary shore:
All earth's full rivers cannot fill
The sea, that drinking thirsteth still.

Sheer miracles of loveliness
Lie hid in its unlooked-on bed:
Anemones, salt, passionless,
Blow flower-like--just enough alive
To blow and multiply and thrive.

Shells quaint with curve or spot or spike,
Encrusted live things argus-eyed,
All fair alike yet all unlike,
Are born without a pang, and die
Without a pang, and so pass by.¹

"By the Sea" may seem an eccentric choice with which to begin an exploration of Rossetti's imaginative world, because it does not fit well in any of the categories of poetry for which she is famous. It is not a love lyric, a children's poem, or a religious poem, in the obvious sense. It differs from Rossetti's other nature poems in seeming to lack an obvious and consistent moral message. Nevertheless, for all its brevity "By the Sea" is marked by the complexities of shifting perspectives and moods, and significant symbolic detail. On a closer examination, the poet's selection of the particulars which compose her word picture begins to cast doubt upon the apparent detachment and moral neutrality of the whole. If one sets "By the Sea" in the context of other Rossetti poems, one can begin to discern the symbolic function of the central image. In

a highly revelatory if partially unconscious way, this image provides an objective correlative for that uniquely mysterious and complex entity which might be called "self". Further, it is possible to trace, through the changes in mood and viewpoint manifested in the several stanzas, some of the emotional attitudes (bewilderment, wonder or awe, wistfulness), which characterize Rossetti's sense of selfhood--her feelings about herself, and her attempts to fathom her own nature.

Since a persistent impulse to clarify and, if possible, harmonize or reconcile the claims of very real and conflicting parts of her self, dictates both theme and formal principles of a major portion of Rossetti's most successful poetry, it is clearly of value in appreciating her art to gain as full an understanding as possible of the various attitudes and emotions which colour her self image, or her sense of self. To this end, a close look at "By the Sea" may serve to enlarge our comprehension of at least one of Rossetti's major thematic concerns.

Why does the sea moan evermore?

The first line, which takes the form of a question, albeit a rhetorical one, establishes a note of identification or sympathy at least, between the human spirit and the nonhuman object of contemplation, by giving the sea a voice capable of expressing feelings rather than a meaningless and involuntary sound, such as inanimate things impress upon our sense. What is the meaning of the agony, the root of the constant disquietude which throbs in the sea's music? The questioning tone suggests a riddle or a mystery, concerning something vast and of almost eternal duration. The speaker certainly does not expect an answer from

a human listener; rather, the question itself is aired so that the listener can grasp it or understand it more fully with all its implications. The vast image he is asked to hold in his mind suggests that order of questions for which such partial "answers" as our reason may furnish are ultimately unsatisfactory. They are useless in dissolving the experiential problem which gives rise to the question. Why must the innocent suffer? Why must I, loving as perfectly as I am able, fail to be loved in return? God being good and omnipotent, why does evil exist?

A partial, but necessarily abstract and unsatisfying answer is implicit in the very next line, which alludes to the sea's unhappy state of permanent exile or exclusion from Heaven. The feeling or sense of this condition is then evoked vividly in our imaginations through the use of more personifying verbs. The sea "makes moan", "frets" and suffers from a "thirst" which all earth's rivers are powerless to assuage.

The detail which is the most remarkable here, and which perhaps most stimulates the curiosity of the observant reader, is the descriptive phrase "Shut out from heaven". Knowing Rossetti's intimate familiarity with biblical imagery, particularly the apocalyptic book of Revelation upon which she wrote a devotional commentary, one can locate the source of this detail quite readily, but the symbolic significance for Rossetti is a deeper and more interesting question. In what way did this particular image set up reverberations in her own soul?

Among the short poems which together form the grouping "Divers Worlds: Time and Eternity", one makes special mention of the sea in characterizing the barren here-and-now. All that is typically of this world will dissolve in the glory of the long-promised world-to-be, of

which the faithful labour to be worthy. In this little poem, which antithetically contrasts "that world" with "here", there is little or no ambiguity about what the sea signifies:

Here incessant tides stir up the main,
 Stormy miry depths aloft are hurled:
 There is no more sea, or storm or stain
 In that world.
 ("His Banner over me was Love", 11.8-11)

The sea here seems to stand for all that is threatening to our happiness or peace in this life: the incessant tides represent, even as they mark with a mechanical regularity, the passage of time itself. Their unalterable rhythms suggest to man the limiting conditions of his own existence, the threat of mortality and of the dissolution of all that is beautiful but transient. Further, the idea of sea and storm is linked with "stain" or sin, the internal threat that lurks, unsuspected and venomous, in man's own heart and sometimes erupts upon the surface: "Stormy miry depths aloft are hurled". In another poem of this grouping, the epithet "separating" precedes "sea". The vast waters become the gulf separating lover from beloved, mourner from the dead, God's faithful from their eternal reward:

Here moans the separating sea,
 Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart;
 There God shall join and no man part,
 All one in Christ, so one--(Please God!)--with me.
 ("Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive", 11.13-16)

And in still another poem, headed with the scriptural passage "Was Thy Wrath Against the Sea?", one meets again the mood of identification and pathos hinted at in the first stanza of "By the Sea":

The Sea laments with unappeasable
 Hankering wail of loss,
 Lifting its hands on high and
 passing by
 Out of the lovely light.

 Lifting its hands on high it
 passes by,
 From light into the night.
 (11.1-4, 7-8)

The speaker apostrophises the sea with the injunction, "Peace, peace, thou sea! God's wisdom worketh well". Then the idea is generalized to become a comment upon the fate of man as well:

Lift we all hands on high, and
 passing by,
 Attest--God doeth right.
 (11.11-12)

But the sense of loss which finds expression in the turbulent sea's lament is in fact unappeasable, for all the moral wisdom of the devout. One feels that the strange and terrible image of the sea, raising its last anguished clamour as it sinks past hope into the final silence, the dark abyss of non-being, evokes a very real and special tremour of sympathetic horror, because it touches off disturbing echoes somewhere deep within Rossetti's own being. The sea, with its limitless thirst, its infinite longings, is locked within the adamantine confines of its "boundary shore". It frets and moans under constraints which hold it fast within the bounds of irredeemable finitude.

The cluster of meanings and emotional attitudes which bear upon the symbolic value of the sea in "By the Sea" is evidently rich and various, since in the first stanza alone a powerful metaphor for the eternity-oriented self locked into the time-bound universe has already

suggested itself.

An alternative reading of this metaphor, which may at first seem the exact opposite to the foregoing interpretation, is on closer examination very closely related to it, and is necessary to grasp the full import of Rossetti's images of restraint (the locked gardens, sealed fountains, buried seeds and so forth). This reading casts the passionate instinctual self in the role of the enchained victim, under the restrictive control of the stern gratification-denying moral conscience. A poem in which this dimension of meaning is perhaps most explicitly present in the sea symbolism is entitled "Enrica". It is one of the several lyrics in which Rossetti sets up a north/south polarity based on her first-hand impressions of Italy, the land of her forefathers. She contrasts the emotional warmth of the southern people with the cold reserve of her "adopted" countrymen, and reflects upon the influence of the latter, particularly, upon her own personality. The poem contrasts a young Italian visitor with her austere hostesses in the Rossetti household:

We chilled beside her liberal glow,
 She dwarfed us by her ampler scale,
 Her full-blown blossom made us pale--
 She summer-like and we like snow.

.
 But, if she found us like our sea,
 Of aspect colourless and chill,
 Rock-girt--like it she found us still
 Deep at our deepest, strong and free.

(11.5-8, 21-24)

Here, as in "By the Sea", a contrast of perspectives is pivotal to the poem's form. We move from the broader, more objective contrast of two "types" of people to the final subtler revelation that the soul is not simple. In the totality of her own "English" nature, the speaker

recognizes both passion and will, emotion and restraint, "depth", and "aspect" or surface. The sea, then, is "rock-girt", forever straining against the adamantine bands that contain it. It is also so vast, so vital, so fathomless as to contain in mysterious depths a whole world to which the law of necessity, the denial of liberty, and the oppression of slavery are utterly meaningless and unknown.

The moaning of the sea (which can be heard from the shore but not on the ocean bed), is the chafing of all prisoners against their shackles, as well as the audible agony of time consciousness. The agony is greater, not less, because the captive has in the depths of his being a persistent and ultimately irrepressible awareness of the meaning of liberty.

To understand the underwater perspective of the second and third stanzas of "By the Sea", one must carry the self or soul analogy a step further, and note that the human personality, bound by time and space, has its corresponding third dimension, its inner escape routes, its intimations of immortality. What are these experiences which place man ambivalently partially outside, and partially inside the domain of time and space, of necessity, physical and moral? Except for a few souls who have achieved spiritual liberation through rare mystical experiences, most of us find the tyranny of the "here-and-now", material and immaterial, to be mitigated only by the existence of that inner, partly conscious, partly subconscious world of memory, dream and imagination. It is just this world that the imagery of the second stanza suggests:

Sheer miracles of loveliness
 Lie hid in its unlooked-on bed:
 Anemones, salt, passionless,
 Blow flower-like--just enough alive
 To blow and multiply and thrive.

(11.6-10)

The degree of significance consciously attached to the highly personal or hidden kinds of experience, varies greatly from person to person. It seems safe to deduce from the subject matter of much of Rossetti's poetry, that her inner world was a rich and valuable treasure house, access to which was seldom entirely cut off for her, a fact which made it possible for her to maintain the calm and uncompromisingly austere exterior which her religious outlook demanded of her, in spite of a deep, irrepressible sense of deprivation and loneliness.

In the mansions of the soul, the individual can become so immersed that the conditions of life can be reversed. He can visit worlds long dissolved, re-enter the enchanted vale of childhood or lost love, or walk wide-eyed and awe-struck by the surpassing beauty and strangeness of the "light that never was on sea or land". In this realm, life and death are parts of a single whole, a painless perfect cycle to which the moaning of the time-conscious is utterly alien:

Shells quaint with curve or spot or spike,
 Encrusted live things argus-eyed,
 All fair alike, yet all unlike,
 Are born without a pang, and die
 Without a pang, and so pass by.
 (11.11-15)

The outward-looking self hears always the despondent murmuring of the sea in his ears; the inward-turned self enters, like the deep sea diver, an enchanted silent world whose laws and atmosphere are different, whose nature is vital and free and seemingly unhampered by the threatening condition of mortality as we experience it.

The poem "Echo" suggests this transcendent quality about inner experience. Rossetti invokes one loved and lost to come in a dream, which,

like the strange ship of Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears", is the medium for the return of friends from "the underworld":

Come to me in the silence of the night;
 Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
 Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
 As sunlight on a stream;
 Come back in tears,
 O memory, hope, love of finished years.

.
 Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
 My very life again tho' cold in death:
 Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
 Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
 Speak low, lean low,
 As long ago, my love, how long ago.
 (11.1-6, 13-18)

The poignancy with which this poem is suffused, the tone, "bitter sweet", like the dream itself, bears witness to the fact that it is not unalloyed delight or complete consolation that is bestowed upon the dreamer. These mixed feelings are the product of several factors. The inconstancy of the dream state, the necessity, for sane folk at least, to return to the public world of the present with all its limitations is an obvious one. The dream image simultaneously hints that the dead are NOT finally dead, the past is NOT utterly lost from existence, and reminds us, by its own impermanence, of the root of our sorrow. Such experiences are the living evidence of a reservoir deep within the self where our lost treasures are preserved and cherished. Yet the treasure house, itself the evidence that something about us is eternal, is stocked to overflowing with sensuous, emotion-charged images of the fruits of this perishable world, ripened to perfection--a circumstance which could hardly fail to cause some religious qualms and moral bewilderment to one who embraced such a world-negating form of the Christian faith as did Christina Rossetti.

The world is dross and must finally be consumed and destroyed.

The miracles of loveliness hidden in the chambers of the sea must certainly perish in the arid atmosphere of the sterile "here-and-now"-- but perhaps they are also too fragile to be nurtured in the atmosphere of paradise:

Together once, but never more
 While Time and Death run out their runs:
 Tho' sundered now as shore from shore,
 Together once.

 Eternity holds rest in store,
 Holds hope of long reunions:
 But holds it what they hungered for
 Together once?
 ("They put their trust in Thee", I, 11.1-4, 8-11)

All earth's rivers cannot assuage the sea's thirst, and Paradise, from which she is an eternal exile, makes no promises to do so. What then of the lost personal treasure which resides in, which even informs man's deepest self--how will it fare in Paradise? Bold statements of these misgivings, like that quoted above, seldom stand unchallenged in the poetry of Rossetti. Rather, they are countered by the pious arguments and "consolations" of the stern moralizing voice of her nature. Hence, the large number of poems which are bi-polar in structure, and take the form of soul dialogues. The searching question raised by the first voice evokes a predictable response:

God's will is best for man whose
 will is free.
 God's will is better to us, yea, than ten
 Desires whereof He holds and
 weighs the key.
 (II, 11.5-7)

The authoritarian voice proclaims tautologically, that what God calls worthless must indeed be worthless. It is profanity to think otherwise. Still, the hushed first voice instinctively rejects this argument, and murmurs a lament of despairing incredulity at the injunction that to save one's life one must lose it utterly.

The orthodox "answer" to the question "How will God make recompense for the agonies of self-deprivation and loss suffered by his faithful?", sometimes seems to Rossetti as incomprehensible and paradoxical as the riddle supplied for ironic consolation to the questioning lover in the anxious dialogue "One Foot on Sea, and One on Shore":

When windflowers blossom on the sea,
And fishes skim along the plain,
Then we who part this weary day,
Then you and I shall meet again.
(11.5-8)

We must sympathize with the tearful reply:

If flowers must blossom on the sea,
Why we shall never meet again.

'My cheeks are paler than a rose,
My tears are saltier than the main,
My heart is like a lump of ice
If we must never meet again.'
(11.11-16)

Rossetti's highly personal poetry conveys a considerable range of attitudes toward the various kinds of inner or subjective experience known to her. Sometimes she welcomes memories, dreams and fancies; sometimes she regards them with fear, guilt or bitter anguish. Occasionally she luxuriates in abandoned delight, enveloped in a phantasy world like that of "Maidensong", where sea-changed immortalized windflowers

never lose their delicate petals, or do so only when they have "fulfill[ed] their appointed fragrance well" ("Downcast", 1.9). More often she stands, "one foot on sea, and one on shore", forever catching glimmerings of submerged loveliness in the cloudy waters, yet hearing perpetually "the unresponsive sounding of the sea" in her ear to remind her of the chains that bind her.

In the sonnet from which this last phrase is taken, the listener detects in the sounding of the sea the added overtones of unrelieved loneliness. Sea and land join in melancholy chorus:

'Aloof, aloof we stand aloof;
 so stand
 Thou too aloof bound with the
 flawless band
 Of inner solitude; we bind not
 thee;
 But who from thy self chain
 shall set thee free?'
 ("The Thread of Life", I, 11.4-7)

The dreamer, not unlike the deep sea diver in his eerie silent surroundings, is indeed "bound with the flawless band of inner solitude". He must take care lest his sanctuary from the insecurities of life become his prison.

In the poem "Autumn" this misfortune has befallen the speaker, who is a desolate island dweller. A new set of images, different but related to those already considered, vividly manifests the tragic sense of isolation and alienation which the self-bound prisoner experiences:

'I dwell alone--I dwell alone,
 alone,
 Whilst full my river flows down

to the sea,
 Gilded with flashing boats
 That bring no friend to me.'
 (11.1-4)

Here it is the painful remoteness of sea from land that becomes metaphorically significant:

Fair fall the freighted boats which
 gold and stone
 And spices bear to sea:
 Slim gleaming maidens swell their
 mellow notes,
 Love promising, entreating--
 Ah sweet but fleeting--
 Beneath the shivering, snow-white
 sails.
 Hush! the wind flags and fails--
 Hush! they will lie becalmed in
 sight of strand--
 Sight of my strand, where I do dwell
 alone;
 Their songs wake singing echoes in
 my land--
 They cannot hear me moan.
 (11.7-17)

The stranded immobile speaker watches her own glowing dreams, hopes, opportunities of fulfillment and joy flow by her. Their "singing echoes", however, are still perceptible. They do not detach themselves from her being, but hover "becalmed" at the periphery of consciousness, goading her into the recognition that sea-bound, they are still part of her, even though severely denied or repressed. The world of dream fulfillment is simultaneously remote and inseparable from the conscious self, and this paradoxical tension is the cause of an almost unbearable anxiety.

The internal realm of dream is not sufficient precisely because it rings with disturbing echoes or reminders of dimensions of experience which Rossetti felt compelled to deny herself, for reasons which no reader,

critic, psychologist or biographer should expect to understand fully or pin down. It is the ultimate loneliness of complete introversion that distresses the half-wakeful illusion-dweller of "Autumn", and the frequent recurrence of such sad figures suggests that kindred feelings in the poet herself cause Rossetti continually to renew her often unsuccessful efforts to bring inner and outer experience into a more healthy relationship. Often she is intensely aware of and grieved by a tragic incongruity between her own mood and the vitality and joy which she senses in the world around her:

I feel no spring while spring is
 well-nigh blown,
 I find no nest, while nests
 are in the grove:
 Woe's me for mine own heart that
 dwells alone,
 My heart that breaketh for a
 little love.
 ("L.E.L.", 11.8-11)

One difficulty in the relating of the imaginative or inner with the actual or outer, is the destructive effect of applying the yardstick of moral and physical necessity, which prevails in the here-and-now, to the realm of imagination. The beauties of the deep undergo a Lamia-like reverse sea change. Dream pearls become dross, worthless. From a rigorous moral perspective, what is delightful and fragrant often becomes dreadful and reeks of decay. There is an especially powerful nightmarish quality about poems focussed upon what one might conceive as the boundary or horizon between inner and outer worlds. Here is the margin of most intense guilt and pain; here the soft wooer becomes the fiendish chthonic predator, and sleep is rudely murdered by hair-raising ghostly visitors--

those "buried, yet not dead":

I have a friend in ghostland--
Early found, ah me how early lost!--
Blood red sea weeds drip along that coastland,
By the strong sea wrenched and tost.

If I wake he hunts me like a nightmare:
I feel my hair stand up, my body creep:
Without a light I see a blasting sight there,
See a secret I must keep.
("A Nightmare", 11.1-8)

It is all too obvious that conditions of life and love which are quite charming and acceptable in phantasy and fairy tale (the sources of which may lie partly below the level of moral consciousness), cannot but show themselves to be inappropriate, implausible, and even morally questionable in the light of "practical considerations".

The happy state of maidenhood in never-never land, involving no responsibilities more trying than the daily plucking of flowers and strawberry leaves which "make maidens fair" ("Maidensong", 1.23), and waiting in perpetual spring for the arrival of meet suitors, bears only a remote relationship to the lamentable state of perpetual spinsterdom in Victorian society, fraught with disheartening feelings of personal inadequacy, uselessness, perhaps even humiliation and severe emotional frustration. Similarly, there is an immeasurable span between idyllic romantic love and erotic love on the fully human plane, where the question of purity of feeling, the deeply instilled sense of shame at self-disclosure, the inevitable risk of rejection or moral censure and disapproval, cloud the pristine hues of the ideal.

The problem of reconciling interior and exterior worlds thus touches upon the religious question of salvation; serious moral questions

challenge the ultimate worth of some of the cherished contents of the inner world of memory, dream and imagination. And yet the difficulty in harmonizing the subjective and the objective spheres extends beyond religious or ethical considerations. Psychologically speaking, the acknowledgement of a world which is separate from the self, and the attempt to hold intercourse with it, is undeniably painful. How often the child in each one of us shrinks from it, preferring to withdraw and commune with the more familiar projections of our own minds! The unpredictable "world out there" is full of risks, threats to our happiness and dignity, and unnerving surprises. As one moves from the child's rather solipsistic perception of things to a more mature acceptance of the "otherness" of other people, one experiences a sharpened awareness of one's own vulnerability.

A group of poems which might be collectively designated as "transformation" poems incorporates a symbolic pattern which reflects Rossetti's intensely fearful or anxious confrontation with the indeterminate, the uncontrollable, inside and outside the self. One of these poems is explicitly entitled "My Dream", suggestive of the hypnotic or dreamlike quality which pervades all the poems here referred to.

The speaker's trance-like state of mind in these poems resembles actual sleep in that it involves a letting-go or at least an apparent relaxation of the self-conscious control usually exercised over thoughts and desires. The moral and rational barriers seem temporarily to dissolve or grow filmy and insubstantial, and consciousness surrenders to the magnetic pull of some forbidden or feared impulse toward wish fulfillment. This momentary capitulation or loosening of the reins constitutes a

penetration through the protective illusion of complete self-mastery and self knowledge, which all too soon expresses itself in an intolerable anxiety and guilt. Soft phantasy elements are transformed into threatening, surrealistic nightmare images. Perhaps the most clear-cut example of this motif is to be found in the short piece, "The World":

By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair:
 But all night as the moon so changeth she;
 Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy;
 And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.
 (11.1-4)

Here, and in other transformation poems, such as "Moonshine" and "Amor Mundi", the self becomes vulnerable by responding to something or some one outside itself. The speaker puts her trust in what she recognizes as beautiful or of worth in the essentially mysterious and unknowable "out there". Then the uncontrollable variable which has been allowed to "flaw the band of solitude" begins to change its aspect. The character of the self is also violated or changed because it now exists in relation to something, not merely in itself. It is significant that it is the fact of "relationship", not the other, per se, that is most threatening:

Is this a friend, indeed, that I should sell
 My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
 Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?
 ("The World", 11.12-14)

It is not only the "other", or the outer world which is uncontrollable. More frightening than that, once one has opened up the avenue of personal relationship to it, or established a bond of emotional response, the flow of feeling is also out of one's rational control. The enemy is without

and within.

A possible defense against, or at least a partial remedy for, this feeling of anxious helplessness--one to which many before and since Rossetti have had recourse--is the process of artistic creation. In an unique fashion art absorbs, transfigures and integrates elements of both inner and outer worlds. Poems such as "The World" and "Amor Mundi" bespeak the relevance of Simon Lesser's insights into the function of form in art: "A driving purpose of form is to transform that which might inspire terror into something which can be contemplated without fear."³

Rossetti was very appreciative of the phantasy narratives and poems of Lewis Carroll. So much so, that her own attempt at prose aimed at a juvenile audience, Speaking Likenesses, is rather too obvious an imitation of that author's imaginative world. The fear and mistrustful anxiety present in the attitudes of both these rather shy, introverted artists finds a striking expression in the sudden distortions of physical appearance and size to which their characters are so frequently and helplessly subject. The startling changes of perspective effected by sudden distortions in size, throwing everything familiar out of proportion, symbolically express the feeling of lack of control, of being gripped by powers, inner or outer, which have got out of hand.

The protagonist of one story in Speaking Likenesses finds herself unavoidably involved in a frightening and grotesque game of touch tag, with a group of very strange, threatening, and in some cases, revolting co-players. One is covered with ugly prickles which penetrate with needle-like pain upon physical contact, one is slimy and slippery, and a third

is sticky and adhesive to the touch. This exaggerated parody of a social situation full of the anxiety which must be tolerated by one who would risk any kind of significant relationship with the world around him, is presented as the troublesome dream experience of a self-centred child who has just made a botch of a parallel situation, her own birthday party, by trying to dominate or control it too much.

The insecurity of the little girl in her inept attempt to keep a firm rein on the situation is related to the more general fear of melting that boundary of inner solitude by which the self perpetuates its sense of detachment and mastery. This barrier once dissolved, the threat is two-fold. The enemy may seem to intrude from outside, like prickly uncontrollable birthday guests who invade the sanctity of inner solitude. Or, according to the images of certain other Rossetti poems, a worse and more terrifying inward enemy is likely at any moment to dislodge itself from the shadowy depths of the personality and, Kraken-like, rise to ascendancy.

The poems "My Dream" and "A Ballad of Boding" seem to combine a deep-rooted archetypal imagery of the release of feared and hidden motives within the self, with a hard-driven moral allegorical comment upon self indulgence. In the first of these, the curious poem "My Dream", a newly spawned crocodile rises from below the turbid, seething surface of the Nile. He begins to swell until, bloated to disgusting proportions, he devours and consumes all other living things around him:

An execrable appetite arose,
He battened on them, crunched, and sucked them in.
He knew no law, he feared no binding law,
But ground them with inexorable jaw.

The luscious fat distilled upon his chin,
 Exuded from his nostrils and his eyes,
 While still like hungry death he fed his maw;
 Till, every minor crocodile being dead
 And buried too, himself gorged to the full,
 He slept with breath oppressed and unstrung claw.
 (11.25-34)

Ultimately the offending creature is doomed to 'dwindle to the common size and weep the proverbial crocodile's tears, upon the arrival of an avenging heavenly emissary. The teller of the dream claims ignorance as to its meaning:

What can it mean? you ask. I answer not
 For meaning, but myself must echo, What?
 And tell it as I saw it on the spot.
 (11.49-51)

There is, of course, the obvious and unremarkable "lesson" that "Sin does not pay". However, the peculiar and spell-binding quality of this poem arises from something else, the intense and even frightening emotive power which inheres in its grotesque imagery.

The symbolic force of the images by far exceeds the limited scope of meaning suggested by the stilted moral framework. If all dream characters are facets of one complex character, that of the dreamer, then both crocodile and avenging angel shadow forth aspects of one total identity--the speaker's. The all-devouring crocodile, exercising an indomitable will and almost magical powers, usurps sovereignty for a brief moment, in return for which he offers up placating tears to the offended Supreme Power. Something analagous is going on within the structure of the poem itself. An unbridled imagination and a firm moralistic controller are housed somewhat incompatibly within the same

self. Perhaps this is why the penitential deus ex machina ending of the poem leaves in the mouth a faint salt taste of crocodile tears.

It would be too generous to pronounce "My Dream" a complete success, because it gives a distinct impression of imbalance. Form and content appear somewhat incongruous, and the whole is at best an unstable compound. Nevertheless, the poem conveys the feeling of the dreamer's emotional complexity, and her anxieties about maintaining proper balance within the self.

In "A Ballad of Boding", the sea is again the dark matrix which spawns a Grendel-like devil figure, "many-handed, grim". Under the sombre moral colouring of the poem, the sea dons its horrible, threatening aspect, and the ocean bed is described as:

Full of things that creep
And fester in the deep
And never breathe the clean
 life nurturing air.
 (11.132-135)

Here are the "miry depths" of the sea poem touched upon earlier, and as such, they represent a sharply contrasting and transformed perspective on the "sheer miracles of loveliness" which are elsewhere to be found in the secret chambers of the sea. It would appear that fear and guilt are the catalysts in this appalling metamorphosis, which, if the symbolic correlation of poetic image with psychological attitude or emotional disposition has validity, reflects a parallel ambivalence or cleavage in the poet's imaginative characterization of the totality of her "self."

Thus we find in Rossetti's various poetic attempts to probe the mysterious nature of the self a great variety of attitudes and insights.

Within herself, Rossetti finds much of hidden beauty, glimmerings of a lost treasure, whisperings of eternity. But also, she finds much that binds her to mortality, much to fear and much that is dark, unknowable, and incongruous with her unquestioning conscious adherence to an inflexible version of orthodox Christianity. These various polarities, and the tensions to which they give rise, find effective expression in the structural harmony and complex symbolism which mark Rossetti's best poetry.

II

THE MARRIAGE MOTIF

Oh lost garden Paradise!--
 Were the roses redder there
 Than they blossom elsewhere?
 Was the night's delicious shade
 More intensely star-inlaid?
Who can tell what memories
Of lost beloved Paradise
Saddened Eve with sleepless eyes?

Yet the accustomed hand for leading,
 Yet the accustomed heart for love:
Sure she kept one part of Eden
 Angels could not strip her of.
Sure the fiery messenger
 Kindling for his outraged Lord,
 Willing with the perfect Will,
Yet rejoiced the flaming sword,
 Chastening sore but sparing still,
Shut her treasure out with her.
 (11.1-8, 27-36)

In "An After-Thought", the poem from which the above lines are taken, Christina Rossetti reflects in passing on the relationship between Adam and Eve which we may regard as the prototype of human marriage. She notes how, in effect, the perpetuation of this relationship softened or mitigated the finality, the absoluteness of the expulsion from Paradise. Adam is Eve's treasure, a very real part of Eden which the angels "could not strip her of", for they are one flesh. This union has inherent in it the seeds of the recovery of that integrity which the Fall has violated. The scope for growth toward unity which even one such loving relationship provides is like a verdant oasis whose fertilizing and reconciling influence can gradually extend to redeem and reclaim the

wilderness.

The imagery of the above poem links the significance of human love and marriage with the notion of a lost Paradise. It is an apt place to begin examining the significance of the marriage motif which is so recurrent in Rossetti's poetry, because this particular link is of essential importance in the poet's symbolic use of marriage, betrothal, and romantic love. From this vantage point we may begin to see the way in which the marriage theme illuminates the larger underlying motif of self-integration.

Walter De la Mare has commented that it is Rossetti's peculiar poetic habit to paint things with the special heightening perspective obtained by seeing them "through" their polar opposites. For example, life is looked at through death in the famous lyric "When I am dead, my dearest . . .".¹ If this is a valid comment upon an unusual feature of Rossetti's artistry, the theme of Paradise must surely be one for which she has a special affinity, since, perforce, it demands a light-seen-from-the-shadows kind of treatment. Again and again she returns to contemplate a more satisfying quality of life of which she feels herself to be deprived --the full and pristine joy of harmonious participation in the life of created nature:

These roses are as perfect as of old,
 Those lilies wear their selfsame sunny white;
 I, only I, am changed and sad and cold.
 The morning star still glorifies the night,
 And musical that fountain in its swell
 Casts as of old its waters to the light.

 I, only I,
 Am changed and sad and cold, while in my soul
 The very fountain of delight is dry.
 ("Downcast", 11.1-6, 22-24)

Often the poet identifies this sense of alienation with the awareness of her own impurity or sin, but many poems also reflect a deep distrust of the joys and beauties this world offers. Usually in Rossetti we feel the chill shadow of the moral obligation to remain detached and separate from what is most appealing here and now, to be "in the world, but not of it":

The door was shut. I looked between
 Its iron bars; and saw it lie,
 My garden, mine, beneath the sky,
 Pied with all flowers bedewed and green.

 A shadowless spirit kept the gate,
 Blank and unchanging like the grave.
 I, peering through, said; 'Let me have
 Some buds to cheer my outcast state.'

He answered not. 'Or give me, then,
 But one small twig from shrub or tree;
 And bid my home remember me
 Until I come to it again!'

The spirit was silent; but he took
 Mortar and stone to build a wall;
 He left no loophole great or small
 Through which my straining eyes might look.

So now I sit here quite alone,
 Blinded with tears; nor grieve for that,
 For nought is left worth looking at
 Since my delightful land is gone.
 ("Shut Out", 11.1-4, 9-24)

The spiritual state imaged in many poems is more devoid of joy, more desperately empty even than Eve's after the Fall. Rossetti's characters frequently deny themselves even the warmth and the comfort of earthly love, for fear of becoming too involved in things which would distract them from a "higher" calling. Since in her own life Rossetti considered and turned painfully away from two opportunities to share in

the closeness of the marriage relationship, we may assume first-hand knowledge on her part of the complexities of emotional ties with an erotic dimension, and we should hardly be surprised that she manifests in her poetry an inbred distrust and fear of romantic love.

Nevertheless, the image of romantic love, and of marriage as the ideal outcome of intense human love relationships, occurs repeatedly. Even if, more often than not, it is viewed from the shadow side--the perspective of separation, bereavement, martyrdom, broken betrothal--it has many positive associations. There is a hope, a hint, that the recovery of wholeness is still somehow possible or should be possible:

Still sometimes in my secret heart of hearts
 I say 'Cor mio' when I remember you,
 And thus I yield us both one tender due,
 Welding one whole of two divided parts.
 ("Cor Mio", 11.14)

The termination or withering of each and every genuine love relationship becomes a parody, a repetition, of the original Fall and expulsion from Eden. It means the end of a fruitful link or fusion with the external world, and a new experience of the isolation and despair of sterile imprisonment within the self.

Informing the symbolism of Christina's poetry is the intuitive insight that if one loses Adam as well as Eden, the resulting spiritual condition is no mere isolation, but rather, a kind of radical dismemberment. As long as Eve is united with Adam, she possesses "one part of Eden the Angels could not strip her of"; it is, as suggested by the strong verb "strip", an intrinsic part of the self, yet paradoxically, it is the key to the potential for self-transcendence. This part of the self

can respond in creative love to the world beyond the finite self. The Eden attribute which Eve retains is the faculty by which one human soul perceives a community, a unity with another, and, by extension, a door opening upon the possibility of unity and reconciliation with the world from which the fallen self feels severed, alienated.

When any moral law demands that Eve give up her "treasure" with the Eden she has already lost upon becoming conscious of sin, that law demands not merely spiritual detachment, but a truncation of the self which the imagery of many Rossetti poems would suggest amounts to slow and agonizing spiritual suicide. Perhaps this is so because human love, and the related experiences of eager emotional responsiveness to the appeals of the senses, offer obscure glimpses, however distorted, of the joyous unity in which all nature might participate were the state of man's soul what it should be.

The power of love to transcend the subject-object dichotomy is manifested in a considerable number of poems in which the line between the speaker and his or her beloved becomes so hazy that two symbolic levels are obvious: one, on which the relationship is between two quite distinct persons, and another, on which the two are seen as fragments of a single personality, as in the poem "Cor Mio", from which I have already quoted. This double image, of sundered lovers and a sundered self, is present in the short poem "Twilight Night". After describing the parting of the lovers, each to "his own land", "to fill his separate place"(11.8,9), Rossetti makes evident the divided state of the speaker's soul:

Alas that we must dwell, my heart and I,
 So far asunder.
 (1.22)

Another poem, entitled "Memory", points up the virtually mortal wound inflicted upon the personality when its natural inclination to embrace the experience of human love or relatedness is completely thwarted. This piece probes the psychological aftermath of a certain crucial decision in the emotional life of the speaker. The turning point alluded to seems to have involved a renunciation of the kind required of several Rossetti heroines who find it necessary to sever all earthly ties in order to attain the degree of pure spirituality to which they aspire:

None knows the choice I made; I make it still.

None knows the choice I made and broke my
heart,

Breaking mine idol: I have braced my will
Once, chosen for once my part.

I broke it at a blow, I laid it cold,
Crushed in my deep heart where it used to
live.

My heart dies inch by inch; the time grows old,
Grows old in which I grieve.

(11.13-20)

The imagery of the poem is fraught with suicidal overtones, yet the attitude of the anguished speaker seems strongly rooted in a sense of moral necessity. The world-renouncing Isadora, in an early Rossetti poem which predates "Memory" by ten years, sums up the essence of this call to martyrdom in the phrase, "the heart's death for the Soul's life" ("Isadora", 1.42). The severance of the bond of love is on one level an act of violence directed inward upon a vital part of the self with inevitable and deeply disturbing after-effects. Already, in the love relationship, the speaker's lonely fortress of selfhood has been penetrated or violated. Part of the other has entered her and remains within,

even as a part of her has now merged with the beloved. Such mingling of identities effectively precludes the possibility of a clean and complete separation at a future time, as Part II of "Memory" makes clear:

If any should force entrance he
 might see there
 One buried yet not dead. . . .
 (11.29-30)

This ghostly indweller, the insubstantial but unbanishable presence of the renounced other, is rather like a shadowy negative transparency, a dark reverse image of the amputated and no longer acknowledged part of the self.

The death and burial imagery of "Memory" leads naturally to a consideration of another group of poems which concern themselves in a more literal way with ghosts. The unquiet spirits of dead, jealous husbands or lovers return in these pieces to haunt their beloved survivors. Dream emissaries from the Underworld bear chilling witness to the indestructibility of the longing after wholeness or union, and the tragic sense of loss which is felt when fulfillment is denied. The ghostly visitant cannot find peace because he is searching for the part of himself which is locked within, or inextricably involved with, the life of the partner left behind on earth. The living partner can no more exorcise the demonically possessive indweller than she can reclaim her own "heart". "The Hour and the Ghost", "The Ghost's Petition", and "The Poor Ghost", are all variations on the above theme.

The ghost poems say again, in a slightly different set of images, that the deep reality of human experience which marriage visibly manifests

cannot be eradicated by the voluntary acceptance of the fact of bereavement or divorce. Nor, as the poem "Memory" hints, can a deliberate act of personal martyrdom and renunciation be expected to prove permanently and irrevocably effective. The other-worldly ascetic, however she may brace herself to bargain "the heart's death for the Soul's life", cannot expect to "deal the death-stroke at a blow:/ To give all, once for all, but never more" ("Three Stages", 11.49-50). Instead, she must be prepared to carry within her one part of Hell which all her moral resolution cannot strip her of. She must hear continually a murmuring which she dare not heed, a voice emanating as much from within as from without, recalling her to her community with the world she has resolved to regard as alien and threatening to her spiritual salvation.

The poem "Three Stages" speaks of "a shady hermitage" where "my spirit shall keep house alone/ Accomplishing its age"(11.52-54), yet later discloses how, under the irresistible influence of spring, the season of rebirth,

Ah too my heart woke unawares,
 intent
On fruitful harvest sheaves.

Full pulse of life, that I had deemed
 was dead;
Full throb of youth, that I had deemed at rest.
(11.73-76)

And again in "From Sunset to Rise Star", the speaker discloses an ambivalence of disposition:

I live alone, I look to die alone.
Yet sometimes when a wind sighs through
 the sedge,
Ghosts of my buried years and friends

come back,
 My heart goes sighing after swallows flown
 On sometime summer's unreturning track.
 (11.10-14)

No matter how stringent the attempts at solitary confinement, the seemingly inert heart, with a virtually indestructible potential for resuscitation, will renew its inward stirrings in response to the inevitable spring renewal of the natural environment.

The heart must be perpetually dying, if the soul is to live; yet it is difficult, in the best of Rossetti's writing, to find any very powerful or emotionally convincing expression of the rewards of increased spiritual vitality which are gained by the sacrifice of the heart's life. It is true that, in addition to the anguished outcries of loneliness, privation and sterility, there are many poems of a devotional nature which convey an attitude of resignation, a willingness to trust that deferred hopes will finally be realized after a longed-for release from this life, grown "tedious in the barren dusk" ("A Better Resurrection", 1.12). It is debatable, however, that these earnest little poems, filled with a sense of world-weariness, are informed with anything which could aptly be called spiritual vitality. Here, one might note an instructive contrast between Rossetti's works and those of certain other religious writers whose mystical, or sacramental views of life kindle and illuminate their poetry. The enraptured soul of Henry Vaughan, for example, is stayed in a vision of "Eternity" which

. . . glows and glitters in my cloudy breast
 Like stars upon some gloomy grove,
 Or those faint beams in which this hill is drest
 After the sun's remove.²

His spiritual transports make vividly real his vision of the faithful dead, now enveloped in that world of light which has become the focus of his whole existence:

I see them walking in an air of glory,
 Whose light doth trample on my days,
 My days, which are at best but dull and hoary,
 Mere glimmering and decays.

O holy hope and high humility,
 High as the heavens above!
 These are your walks, and you have showed them me
 To kindle my cold love.
 ("They Are All Gone", 11.9-16)

For Gerard Manley Hopkins, exulting in the wealth of beauty that overwhelms the senses at harvest time, all of created nature is charged with divine meaning:

I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
 Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our
 Saviour;
 And, eyes, heart, what looks, what lips yet
 gave you a
 Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder
 replies?³

Reading Hopkins, or Vaughan, despite the great differences in the tone and texture of their verse, we can hardly miss the remarkable sense of the immediacy, the almost tangible closeness, of the Divine presence, of the spiritual realm which so holds their gaze and ignites their imaginations. There is an energy here which seems to bespeak a full inner spiritual life, providing, at least for the poet, ample evidence that the Soul's life is indeed its own abundant reward. But we shall search long in Rossetti's consciously religious verse before we find anything with the positive spiritual vibrancy of Hopkins' "Hurrahing in Harvest":

The heart rears wings bold and bolder
 And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him
 off under his feet.
 (11.13-14)

Rather, in the Rossetti poems, both lyric and narrative, the reader is confronted with a somewhat confusing ambiguity of values. This evidences itself in what might be variously and perhaps over simply described as an incongruity of form with content, of moral theory or idea with poetic practice or style. The crux of this rather subtle problem is the attitude, overt or implicit, toward the "heart", which, it seems, is a vital organ despite its profane associations with the dread Triumvirate (the World, the Flesh, and the Devil). The fact emerges that whatever the doomed heart represents, that heart--in its enforced subservience, its perennial stirrings and reawakenings--provides the subject of Rossetti's most vivid poetic statements. It is the heart's life which connects with the deep joyous impulses of the natural world, and that life, therefore, finds in the powerfully evocative imagery of bud, flowering and fruition its fitting embodiment or manifestation. Recognizing the question to be possibly of more psychological than aesthetic import, and hence only tangentially relevant to critical analysis, one might easily be led to surmise from the imagery of her verse, that the poet's sense of inner vitality, her moments of feeling most intensely and deeply alive, are closely linked with her involuntary response to the sensuous appeal of the animate world around her, both human and nonhuman, in its energy, its colour, its power to move. This irrepressible sensuousness, juxtaposed as it is with an unflinching world-negating ideology, has deeply interested more than one Rossetti

commentator.

Only occasionally in Rossetti, and then only for brief moments, do we glimpse a world where the heart and soul do not drain potency from one another, but burn with a single flame. In "Maidensong", for example, purity and a full response to what is dearest and most satisfying among this world's treasures, are allowed to glow in the same person: here, in a rare atmosphere of unclouded affirmation of life, we find a thoroughly positive variation on the marriage motif. And this same overpowering sense of life and wholeness springing directly from the heart's awakening, pervades the often anthologized poem "A Birthday":

My heart is like a singing bird
 Whose nest is in a watered shoot:
 My heart is like an apple tree
 Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
 My heart is like a rainbow shell
 That paddles in a halcyon sea;
 My heart is gladder than all these
 Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
 Hang it with vair and purple dyes;

.
 Because the birthday of my life
 Is come, my love is come to me.
 (11.1-10, 15-16)

The full and vibrant tone of celebration in "A Birthday", which, in the truest sense, is a hymn, though to life and love rather than directly to God, contrasts sharply with the sombre colouring of many of Rossetti's more conventionally religious poems. If we set beside "A Birthday" such pieces as "'When my heart is vexed I will complain'", "I Look for the Lord", or "'Of him that was ready to perish'", we must agree with Ifor Evans' comment that Rossetti's "devout other-worldliness leaves

her with a deep somewhat baffled antagonism to life", but we are also made keenly aware of that "warm desire [which] kindles within her for joy and love, the pleasurable and sensuous acceptance of life".⁴

There was much in Christina Rossetti which simply could not accept as adequate or complete a concept of Soul which remained airy and incorporeal, and which failed to acknowledge an intrinsic link with the realm of sense and nature. The perpetual attempt to modify the boundaries of the recognized self so as to exclude the body and natural impulses here results in a strong sense of self division, alienation from her own heart, a state which is the antithesis of self-integration, and which imagistically is often rendered as the broken betrothal, divorce, and forced or sacrificial separation. Thus, although the recurrence of the betrothal or marriage motif could be interpreted on a biographical level as the neurotic preoccupation of a lonely spinster whose failure to find happiness and security through marriage has left her melancholy and disappointed in life, it might more profitably be seen as the attempt to give symbolic expression to a profound intuitive perception of the deeper source of her loneliness. That loneliness may best be understood as a kind of self-alienation, which could be remedied only by a perfect "marriage" of those aspects of the self which we labour to articulate but succeed only in separating, into categories such as soul and sense, spirit and body, inner and outer.

In Rossetti's poetry, the visible product of the poet's imaginative activity, we encounter a wealth of symbolism and imagery which reveals the poet's central concern with such a marriage or union of the self. There are images which point backward toward a lost unity of being;

there are those which seek to envision some future fulfillment, a final eschatological righting of the balance; and there are those rooted, it would seem, in a dimension outside or beyond temporal, moral and rational necessity, which convey a radically different vision of reality, one in which a creative and satisfying reconciliation of the demands of the falsely dichotomized impulses of sensuousness and morality is both desirable and possible. Very occasionally, one sees the poet's imagination piercing through religious and social convention to envision a world where the alienated fragments of the dismembered self meet and fuse, and repressive divisions melt away. (Here, of course, Rossetti is heir to a central concern of the Romantic tradition in which her poetic development took place.)

It is true that by some moral and utilitarian standards of Rossetti's day and our own, the life energy thus channelled into the imaginative function will be seen as siphoned off from the main stream of productive human activity: the specific content of Rossetti's poems, be it the richly fantastic detail of the fairy-tale narratives, or the highly personal reflections of the sonnets and lyrics, often appears to be quite remote from the public and topical concerns of her time. If we compare the inward-looking perspectives of her art with the growing trend among her contemporaries to use art forms as vehicles for social comment, and prods to social and political action, we may partly appreciate the claim that art such as Rossetti's is escapist, an epithet which perhaps need not carry so strong a negative value judgement as it does in the mouths of some critics. Escape, yes--but from what and to what? There is a kind of relevance which derives from mere topicality, but the artist

deserves our praise rather than our reproach when he moves beyond such timeliness to discover within himself imaginative space where the view is clearer and yields at least glimpses of timeless human truths.

In a letter to Dante Gabriel, Christina Rossetti spoke modestly of her own limitations, disavowing both the ability and the inclination to assume the literary role of social critic. This she was content to leave to others, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom she believed to be greater because of the wider range of their poetic interests. Yet for us, reading her work a century later, to admit the subjective and very personal qualities of much of the poetry is not to deny its prophetic character or the universality of some of its insights. On the contrary, it is possible that only in the realm of such art can the imagination throw off the fetters of a restrictive public world and give free and powerful expression to a vision of a fuller, potentially unified experience of reality.

The language of Rossetti's most adequate imaginative achievements is quietly eloquent and has the intonation of truth. In the medium of her songs, seeming contraries are embraced in a single reconciling whole, even as, in the poem "Somewhere or Other", the lost treasures of memory--loved ones, past events--although sunk forever in the abyss of time past, still offer an invisible but fully real dimension of present experience. We feel the almost palpable proximity of these treasures:

Somewhere or other, maybe far or near;
 With just a wall, a hedge, between;
 With just the last leaves of the dying year
 Fallen on a turf grown green.
 (11.9-12)

Individual poems vary widely in tone, of course. Some are illumined with a rare hope; others are shaded in the despair of one who sees what is of ultimate worth, but has not the means or the strength to attain it. The wall or hedge which interferes with the poet's unity of perception, or of being, seems, dreamlike, to wax and wane, to vary in its degree of opacity. There are moments when an adamant wall separates the world of imagined fulfillment, of heartfelt inner needs, from the merciless conditions of day-to-day life. Reconciliation of life's heart-breaking polarities seems quite out of reach. The mood is close to tragic: the overpowering sense of waste and disappointment, and the anxiety it produces are often poetically embodied in the image of disappointed human love, the broken vow, or some other negative variation of the marriage symbol.

This dark condition of the soul is fully explored in the phantasy narrative "The Prince's Progress". The poem is focussed upon a literal marriage which fails to take place between a rightfully betrothed royal pair. In a parable-like manner, it shows us the painful circumstances which are the setting for this failure, and through the symbolic imagery of the piece we arrive at some understanding of the nature and causes of the alienation which is central to its meaning. Sense and soul, dream and reality, activity and passivity, involvement and detachment, are all elements in this poem of polarities. One feels that it is because of the division of experience into such discrete categories that the projected marriage is impossible.

Still, even a cursory reading makes clear that the subtleties of the narrative cannot be laid bare effectively by a tidy allegorical

approach. Though we recognize the archetypal craggy wastelands and sensuous paradises of the story as inner landscape, and dimly suspect the theatre of the drama to be the human personality, we cannot arrive at a simple identification between character or event and abstract concept. Despite the unmistakably moralistic tone of many passages and the emphasis upon the Prince's irresolute character and his proclivity to surrender his sense of purpose and direction to the weaknesses of the flesh, the nuances of the whole work will likely elude a reader who sees the central figures as no more than allegorical representations of flesh and spirit.

Not that this scheme may not have been present in the poet's mind as a significant part of the work's conception; indeed, the imaginative detail and moral coloring argue strongly that, at least on one level, a powerful current of anti-flesh, anti-world, anti-life feeling is being expressed.

The Prince, insofar as he is Body, is not worthy of the Princess, who is Soul. He is "strong of limb, but of purpose weak"(1.48). The marriage seems wrong from the start. Why, we must ask ourselves, should such a weak, lazy, sensually indulgent man be promised to such a paragon of faithful, noble womanhood? Amid the suspense and anxiety of the action, the sorrow and frustration of the dark ending, one can hardly miss the unspoken question: "Who is responsible for this tragic and grotesque mismatch? Would marriage to this knave have been fitting at all, or is death perhaps a blessing in disguise when it comes to the ethereal Princess?" The concept of the imprisoned soul waiting for release from earthly bondage quite obviously corresponds on one level to the image of the pining princess in her anguish.

But the poignant figure of the would-be bride, dreaming her barren life away in a lonely tower, evokes much wider and more complex associations. After all, if the simple Prince=body, Princess=soul equation were an adequate summing up of the dynamics at work, then death, the moment of release, would be triumphant, not full of nostalgic mourning for what might have been, and weighed down with a sense of irrecoverable loss. Although the chorus of mourners announces to the tardy Prince that it is too late for tears to be appropriate, it is also:

Too late for love, too late for joy,
 too late, too late!
 You loitered on the road too long,
 You trifled at the gate:
 The enchanted dove upon her branch
 Died without a mate;
 The enchanted princess in her tower
 Slept, died, behind the grate;
 Her heart was starving all this while
 You made it wait.
 (11.479-488)

As the Princess is borne out upon her bier, there is no confident assurance offered that her soul is now enjoying well-earned bliss. We are told that she "must wear a veil to shroud her face/ And the want graven there . . ."(11.505-506). Moreover, the question of a compensatory hereafter is hinted at in only the vaguest, most dubious way, and it seems that the most that can be said for death is that after such intense suffering, oblivion is surely relief. We are certainly left with the uneasy feeling that we are witnessing a case where the heart's starvation has resulted not in the soul's health, but in the withering of all life:

Does she live? --Does she die? --she
 languisheth
 As a lily drooping to death,

of hostility and alienation between the various motivating energies of the self, such a revolt results only in an amorphous anarchy, a loss of all form, focus, and direction in life. There is an attempt to satisfy the thirst for the sensuous and emotional, but at the expense of other values. A different sort of excess or disproportion results, instead of the nonrepressive harmony, the reconciling unity of being that creatively organizes for maximum joy and fulfillment the various interests of the total personality. There is no resolution, but a widening of the chasm separating flesh or feeling and spirit or form.

The case of the Princess is different, but equally unsatisfactory. The royal heroine brings to mind a host of other lonely prisoners, "bound with the flawless bands of inner solitude". It is a short step imaginatively from Eve outside the locked garden, to the lonely tower-dweller who finds that the wall separating her from the heart's desires, rather than enclosing Eden, surrounds her alone, while all Paradise blooms and blows without. Like the speaker in "Downcast", she must exclaim:

I, only I,
Am changed and sad and cold,
 while in my soul
The very fountain of delight is dry.
 ("Downcast", 11.22-24)

The Princess in her one white room looks out through her golden grate on a valley

Where fatness laughed, wine, oil and bread,
Where all fruit-trees their sweetness shed,
Where all birds made love to their kind,
Where jewels twinkled, and gold lay red,
 And not hard to find.
 ("Prince's Progress", 11.420-424)

She is a single withered and barren fig tree in a verdant and fruitful vineyard. She is withdrawn, single, totally passive in a world where nourishment and vitality depend on fruitful relationship between what is inner and outer. She would rather sleep than wake, because dream is the only acceptable medium for the expression of her desire. A chorus soothes her discontent with the advice,

Sleep, dream and sleep;
 Sleep (they say): 'we've muffled
 the chime;
 Better dream than weep.'
 (11.10-12)

There are in Rossetti's poetic world others who choose the dream world in preference to waking reality--the heroine of the poem "Day-Dreams", for example, and the slumbering young hero of "Dream-Love", who "drowns away to poppied death",

For oh in waking
 The sights are not so fair,
 And song and silence
 Are not like these below.
 (11.29-32)

Despite the similarities of these figures to the passive Princess, however, these shorter poems differ in mood, revealing a deeper acceptance of phantasy over reality, a resignation to the double life, the inner escape which is totally detached from outward experience:

Young love lies dreaming
 Till summer days are gone,--
 Dreaming and drowsing
 Away to perfect sleep:
 He sees the beauty
 Sun hath not looked upon,

And tastes the fountain
 Unutterably deep.
 (11.33-40)

Young Love is hushed to rest by "perfect music"; there is no need for a veil to hide the want graven upon his visage. Rather,

Cool shadows deepen
 Across the sleeping face,
 (11.52-53)

in a sanctuary curtained by "Branched evergreen", of which the poet says:

Change cannot touch them
 With fading fingers sere.
 (11.60-61)

"Dream-Love" is a vision of deep inner longings which are somehow content with phantasy fulfillments, and as such, the poem does not offer so realistic a treatment of the problem as "The Prince's Progress". In the latter, sleep and death, the ultimate withdrawal, are shown to be an imperfect solution. "Dream-Love", by way of further contrast, creates a picture of the magical, numinous world of the imagination similar to that conjured up by Rilke, in his Sonnets to Orpheus:

Almost a maid, she came forth shimmering
 From the high happiness of song and lyre,
 And shining clearly through her veils of spring
 She made herself a bed within my ear
 And slept in me. All things were in her sleep:
 The trees I marvelled at, the enchanting spell
 Of farthest distances the meadows deep,
 And all the magic that myself befell.
 Within her slept the world. You singing god, o how
 Did you perfect her so she did not long
 To be awake? She rose and slept.
 Where is her death?⁶

Unlike Rilke's dream maid, the Princess in her tower does long to awaken, to cross the portal, to bloom with the crimson poppies at her feet, rather than to drowse perpetually, spellbound, among the white poppies, heavy with death's fragrance. Within the framework of "The Prince's Progress", the realm of the imagination, dream, phantasy and art is where the secret desires of the heart take miraculous form and where their fulfillments are envisioned, but this articulation within a separate category of the mind proves wanting precisely because it does nothing to integrate the separate dimensions of personal experience. The betrothal, under these conditions can never be consummated in a true marriage of heaven and earth. The passive dreamer waits, immersed in a spell of paralyzed, vain longing, feeling the life ebb within her, and watching the fruitful commerce, the joyous mutual nourishment of the living things that flourish around her.

A central irony of "The Prince's Progress" is that the Prince, for all his unworthiness, is undoubtedly the link with the world, the life of the senses without which the Princess, "blue with famine after love", cannot indefinitely survive. He absorbs and assimilates that which is ripest and warmest in his environment, and carries a phial which contains the Life Elixir.

Tragically, the Princess herself is not able to advance one step toward him, to reach out to life actively: she can only wait for release which comes in the form of death not life. Condemned to this sterile passivity, it is little wonder that many of Rossetti's dreamers, like the speaker in "From the Antique" turn to thoughts of death's true and final oblivion as preferable to death in life:

It's a weary life, it is, she said:--
 Doubly blank is a woman's lot:
 I wish and I wish I were a man:
 Or better than any being, were not:

Were nothing at all in all the world,
 Not a body, and not a soul:
 Not so much as a grain of dust
 Or drop of water from pole to pole.
 (11.1-8)

Many of Rossetti's feminine subjects express this world-weary attitude, and frequently it is "rest at the heart's core", mental peace, the end of present inner conflict, that is longed for, leaving quite aside the matter of Heavenly consolation:

Rest, rest, a perfect rest
 Shed over brow and breast;
 Her face is toward the west,
 The purple land.
 She cannot see the grain
 Ripening on hill and plain,
 She cannot feel the rain
 Upon her hand.
 ("Dreamland", 11.17-24)

Another group of poems does look toward a final "reward" after death, which is envisioned, sometimes in quite subjective and tangible terms, sometimes in the more enigmatic and strangely remote though colourful imagery of the Book of Revelation. These poems also are rich in marriage symbolism. Christ becomes the heavenly lover, or spouse. He is the Eternal Bridegroom of gospel imagery, and union with him becomes a symbol of the wholeness which the speaker has ceased to hope for in the present life:

'Bride whom I love, if thou too lovest Me,
 Thou needs must choose My Likeness for thy
 dower:

So wilt thou toil in patience, and abide
 Hungering and thirsting for that blessed hour
 When I My Likeness shall behold in thee,
 And thou therein shalt waken satisfied.'
 ("Why?", 11.9-14)

The special place to be enjoyed by the soul in the Heavenly Kingdom is contemplated with awe and gratitude, as in the lines entitled "After Communion":

Why should I call Thee Friend,
 Who art my Love?
 Or King, Who art my very Spouse
 above?
 Or call Thy Sceptre on my heart
 Thy rod?
 Lo now Thy banner over me is love
 (11.2-5)

Indeed, the image of the Divine Spouse is so pervasive that it crops up even in the sonnet cycle "Monna Innominata", which presumably concerns itself with the course of a human love affair, viewed from the feminine perspective. When the impassioned speaker thinks of approaching God on her lover's behalf, it is the metaphor of Esther and the king that best befits her expression of sacrificial love:

'I, if I perish, perish'--Esther spake:
 And bride of life or death she made her fair
 In all the lustre of her perfumed hair
 And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.
 She put on pomp of loveliness, to take
 Her husband through his eyes at unaware;

 If I might take my life so in my hand,
 And for my love to Love put up my prayer,
 And for love's sake by Love be granted it!
 ("Monna Innominata", 8, 11.1-6, 12-14)

The classic biblical hymeneal, the Song of Solomon, was one of

Rossetti's favourite sources of imagery, along with the Book of Revelation, and in a poem headed with the quotation, 'In the day of his Espousals', she pays tribute to its "high tones and mysterious undertones". Doubtless, Rossetti accepted the traditional Christian interpretation of the work as the love song of Christ to his bride, the Church. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should have caught and held the admiration of this poet, of whom Georgina Battiscombe remarked that her erotic love poems possess a touching purity, while her "expressions of agape are strongly tinged with eros".⁷

Among the religious poems, examples of the use of the marriage symbol in ways similar to those illustrated above are so numerous as to become rather monotonous. Many of the poems are repetitiously alike in both theme and image, and are so biblical in content that they become almost impersonal, or, at least, far from memorable as imaginative expressions of a unique personality with a highly individual vision of experience. This is especially true of the devotional verse written after 1884. Here and there, however, Rossetti's expression of religious feeling achieves a rare intensity and unique power to move. A significant feature of more than one of these "peaks" is the attainment of an unusual concreteness, even sensuousness, in the evocation of the analogy between human and Divine love, or emotional commitment to human flesh-and-blood beloved and love for Christ.

One such poem is called "Hymn After Gabriele Rossetti", and appears in two versions in the Collected Poems. It begins, in the first version with the exclamation:

My Lord, my love! in love's unrest
 How often have I said,
 'Blessed that John who on Thy breast
 Reclined his head!
 (11.1-4)

In the second stanza, the speaker asserts that she need not envy the beloved apostle,

Now that Thou, Lord, both Man and God,
 Dost dwell in me:
 Upbuilding with Thy Manhood's might
 My frail humanity;
 Yea, Thy Divinehood pouring forth,
 In fullness filling me.
 (11.11-16, second version)

She prays for Christ to consecrate her person as his own temple and mount his throne there, and rejoices that he takes delight in her for his dwelling-place:

The Seraphim in ecstasy
 Fall prone around Thy house,
 For which of them hath tasted Thee,
 My Manna and my Spouse?
 (11.21-24, first version)

The speaker sees herself as a temple or dwelling for her God, then as a living vessel, eagerly receptive and filled full of his miraculous enlivening "Divinehood", and finally, in the last stanza of the first version, as a garment to be worn by the living Christ. The coinage of this last metaphor is particularly striking, perhaps because it is more directly tactile or sensuous than the others. Even as a garment is filled by the living form it enfolds, and grows warm as the flesh it touches, even thus will the person of the speaker be entered, warmed and moved by Christ, her Beloved:

Now Thou dost wear me for a robe
 And sway and warm me through . . .
 (11.25-26)

In the context of the explicitly religious poetry, Christ figures as the symbol of self-completion and the recovery of wholeness. Elsewhere, the celestial bridegroom has his terrestrial counterparts in Adam, the earthly husband or lover, and the fairytale princes or heroes. The feminine subjects of Rossetti poems long for the full consummation of their love for these symbolic figures, and this dream of union with the beloved is clearly analogous to the deep longing after self-integration which informs so much of Rossetti's work.

One non-religious variation on this theme is the the phantasy narrative "Maidensong". Among the longer poems it is distinctive in its mood of joyous celebration and acceptance of life in all its fullness:

When Meggan pluckt the thorny rose,
 And when May pulled the brier,
 Half the birds would swoop to see,
 Half the beasts drew nigher.
 Half the fishes of the streams
 Would dart up to admire.
 But when Margaret pluckt a flag flower
 Or poppy hot aflame,
 All the beasts and all the birds
 And all the fishes came
 To her hand more soft than snow.
 (11.10-20)

It is clear from the outset that the "merry maidens" of this story stand in a very different relation to the world around them from that of the alienated heroine of "The Prince's Progress". In this land where "three maids were wooed and won/ In a brief May-tide" the rich textures and colours of the natural world do not stand in ironic contrast to the

withered greyness of the central character's spiritual landscape. On the contrary, her full heart, like that of the singer in "A Birthday", overflows its bounds, to participate in, delight in and reflect the creative life and growth around her. The lush natural description of the poem is an effective way of creating a mood which corresponds to the state of Margaret's soul. As such, it may remind us of a similar symbolic use of nature in another rare celebration of human love, Rossetti's "A Bride Song".

In "A Bride Song" the radiant love in the singer's heart reaches out like an embrace, transforming the wilderness into Paradise. The path that leads the lover to his bride opens before him, a veritable Eden of lush colour, fragrance and verdure. The opulence of June is here, evoking a quality of experience which is whole, not fragmentary; fulfilled, not repressed. The imagery suggests life lived joyously and spontaneously the outer form of things expressing and reflecting their inner meanings. The true marriage of sense and soul is here a joyous inner congruity through which the body is revealed as a sanctified and worthy extension of the soul.

In the delineation of the close relationship between the nature children of "Maidensong" and the life around them, Rossetti is characteristically bold enough to include references to more than the "poetical" forms of plant and animal life. The birds trilling on Margaret's window sill are perhaps a prettier thought than the fish "gasping on the floor". Again, the picture of Meggan and May in their thyme-fragrant meadow includes a surprisingly earthy detail:

Sunglow flushed their comely cheeks,
 Windplay tossed their hair,
 Creeping things among the grass
 Stroked them here and there.
 (11.63-66)

These details remind us of the poet's curious affinity with the most "unspiritual" citizens of the animal kingdom, an eccentricity which led her elsewhere to include and enumerate some rather extraordinary and "obtuse and furry" co-habitors of her own personal imaginative garden of Eden:

My trees were full of songs and
 flowers and fruit;
 Their branches spread a city to the air
 And mice lodged in their root.

My heath lay farther off, where
 lizards lived
 In strange metallic mail, just spied
 and gone;
 Like darted lightnings here and there
 perceived
 But nowhere dwelt upon.

Frogs and fat toads were there to
 hop or plod
 And propagate in peace, an
 uncouth crew,
 Where velvet-headed rushes rustling
 nod
 And spill the morning dew.

All caterpillars throve beneath my
 rule,
 With snails and slugs in corners
 out of sight;
 I never marred the curious sudden stool
 That perfects in a night.
 ("From House to Home", 11.26-40)

The unromantic but very realistic flesh and blood bestiary above, taken from the poem, "From House to Home", and the corresponding animal

imagery of "Maidensong" echo an archetypal motif which Jung has observed to be common in fairy tales, and in the dreams and phantasies of his patients. He calls this theme "making friends with" or "calming" the "beast", and finds it revelatory of an attempt to regain a proper balance within the personality, especially in individuals who are strongly repressing the natural physical and instinctual or erotic side of their personalities in favour of a strong intellectual or rational bias.

In Man and his Symbols, an interesting basic commentary on Jungian psychology and its therapeutic application, Joseph L. Henderson gives an illuminating and full exposition of this thematic element in the well known fairy tale, "Beauty and the Beast".⁸ There, the incongruous alliance between the pure virginal-spiritual maiden and the repulsive, even threatening figure of the Beast is characterized by an almost incomprehensible growing tenderness. The genuine affection which binds them to one another has an ultimately liberating function, and succeeds in releasing the beast from an evil spell, while at the same time redeeming his bestiality. Significantly, the girl must accept the prince in his bestial form, which symbolically points to the insight that full humanity encompasses rather than denies its animal component. The story ends with the familiar royal marriage between the two now fully human lovers.

In Psyche and Symbol, in a chapter entitled "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales", Jung explains that ". . . because of its almost total unconsciousness, the animal has always symbolized the psychic sphere in man which lies hidden in the darkness of the body's instinctual life".⁹ It would seem clear that this sphere must be comprehended and brought into the light of consciousness before man can achieve spiritual

wholeness and truly appreciate his own nature and place in the order of existence. Not to become dogmatic, there appears to be considerable evidence of a psychological nature that the recurrent theme in folklore and literature of befriending or accepting kinship with the beast is often expressive of an inner intuitive urge toward deeper and broader self-awareness and self-integration:

The Self is often symbolized as an animal, representing our instinctive nature and its connectedness with our surroundings. That is why there are so many helpful animals in fairytales. This relation of the Self to all surrounding nature and even the cosmos probably comes from the fact that the "nuclear atom" of our psyche is somehow woven into the whole world, both outer and inner.¹⁰

We may or may not attribute to this kind of animal imagery the far-reaching archetypal significance that Jung finds in it. However, his interpretation sheds some interesting light upon certain peculiarities of Rossetti's poetic imagery. Rossetti's unconventional tendency to populate her poetry with rather unromantic little beasts, providing a startling counter balance to the more aetherial and graceful elements, may bear directly upon her thematic concern: through her imagery she is expressing an urge to integrate the conscious and the unconscious, to marry inner and outer reality in an acceptable, self-fulfilling and self-transcending union.

Margaret, the graceful queen of "Maidensong", has indeed "befriended the beast". With her harmonious singing she draws together and unifies all existence in a beautiful pattern of love and fulfillment. She is the type of the artist, and in her powers she is like the mythical figure of Orpheus, the antique musician who had a similar spell-binding effect on the natural world around him.

In an exposition of the importance of the Orpheus myth for humanity, Herbert Marcuse points to its revelation of an experience of the world in which "the opposition between man and nature, subject and object, is overcome":

Being is experienced as gratification, which unites man and nature so that the fulfillment of man is at the same time the fulfillment without violence of nature. In being spoken to, loved, cared for, flowers and springs and animals appear as what they are--beautiful . . . the things of nature become free to be what they are. . . . The song of Orpheus pacifies the animal world, reconciles the lion with the lamb and the lion with man. The world of nature is a world of oppression, cruelty and pain, as is the human world; like the latter it awaits its liberation. . . . The song of Orpheus breaks the petrification, moves the forests and the rocks--but moves them to partake in joy.¹¹

There is no blockade, no adamant wall to separate or divorce Margaret from what blooms and buds and flowers, no dark shadow of guilt or required martyrdom, no fear to stand between her and delightful consummation of human love, or true marriage:

So Margaret sang her sisters home
 In their marriage mirth;
 Sang free birds out of the sky,
 Beasts along the earth,
 Sang up fishes of the deep--
 All breathing things that move--
 Sang from far and sang from near
 To her lovely love;
 Sang together friend and foe;

Sang a golden-bearded king
 Straightway to her feet,
 Sang him silent where he knelt
 In eager anguish sweet.
 But when the clear voice died away,
 When longest echoes died,
 He stood up like a royal man
 And claimed her for his bride.
 (11.211-227)

"Maidensong" concludes with this happy scene of nuptial festivities,

and so provides us with perhaps the most positive version of marriage symbolism which we come upon in Rossetti's poetry. Here, as we have seen to be true in the great majority of other variations considered in this study, the imagery of marriage manifests itself as part of a larger and singularly important theme or concern: the quest for self-integration, or the recovery of that wholeness sadly lacking in most human experience.

III

SISTERHOOD AND THE QUEST FOR WHOLENESS

"Maidensong", besides containing marriage symbolism, is an obvious example of a group of poems in which yet another important image pattern emerges as part of the pervasive self-integration motif in Rossetti's poetry. This significant pattern has been noted by Winston Weathers in his article entitled "The Sisterhood of Self". Sisterhood, as Weathers demonstrates by an impressive catalogue of relevant pieces, is a frequent subject of many Rossetti poems and often provides the organizing principle. The sister grouping often functions as a complex metaphor for the self, as Rossetti explores and tries to integrate the various categories of personal experience.

Rossetti was much more familiar with the dynamics of her own colourful and individualistic family than she was with any other types of social organization or relationship. Even the conventional patterns of courtship and romantic love were a little foreign and uncomfortable to this quiet woman, whose interests were described by De la Mare as "somewhat parochial".¹ The drama of her life was for the greater part acted out within the narrow but vital circle of her immediate kinfolk. She knew the sibling group to be strongly bound by family loyalties and affection, yet not immune from deep rivalries, jealousy and frustrations which sometimes seethed below the surface, and from time to time erupted into the open. It is not surprising, therefore, that she should draw on the experiences which she knew most intimately as a major source of poetic

imagery.

The sister poems vary widely in tone and in degree of complexity. They range from slight, simple pieces such as "Minnie and Mattie" in the children's collection "Sing-Song",² to the considerably more extended, multi-level masterpiece "Goblin Market",³ and Rossetti's juvenilia, poems all written before the poet was eighteen, includes a group of pieces that together provide a fitting place to begin a study of the sister motif. These poems have feminine names for titles, and three of the most interesting present their subjects through the medium of a dramatic monologue. "Isadora", "Zara", and "Immalee", though they fail to provide fully rounded, clear-cut characterizations, do capture in a concrete way transient moments of feeling, contrasting dispositions toward life and love. They delineate some perspectives of an inner debate which was to underlie much of Rossetti's subsequent writing and the central issue stands out clearly when we set the three monologues side by side.

Immalee, the picture of innocent joy and perfect freedom, is perhaps the prototype of the "Maidensong" trio. Her relationship with the natural world around her is one of loving openness and mutual fulfillment, and the atmosphere of the poem is one of sensuous yet pure delight:

I gather thyme upon the sunny hills,
And its pure fragrance ever gladdens me,
And in my mind having tranquillity
I smile to see how my green basket fills.
And by clear streams I gather daffodils;
And in dim woods find out the cherry-tree,
And take its fruit and the wild strawberry
And nuts and honey; and live free from ills.
I dwell on the green earth, 'neath the blue sky,
Birds are my friends, and leaves my rustling
roof:

The deer are not afraid of me, and I
Hear the wild goat, and hail its hastening
hoof;
The squirrels sit perked as I pass them by,
And even the watchful hare stands not aloof.

"Zara" offers a frightening contrast to "Immalee". The speaker here is one in whom bitterness and cynicism have festered--the pestilent outgrowth of a love relationship tainted with sin and infidelity. Her life is a personal Hell, because in her changed circumstances--her lover has wed another woman--a love which had seemed noble is now regarded as a crime:

Rend thy hair, lost woman, weep without
dissembling;
The heart torn forth from it, shall the
breast not bleed?
(11.11,12)

Zara generalizes cynically that her betrayer's bride will suffer the same unkind usage, and pronounces with the grim ring of inevitability, "Thou hast sucked the honey,--feel the stinging's smart"(1.20). Clearly the blight upon her spirit has radically altered her whole perception and evaluation of life, and finally the hostility and disillusionment that she feels are directed inward upon herself in a death wish. By this violent redirection of negative feelings, she succeeds in completely cutting off any meaningful connection between the world and herself:

Vengeance which pursues thee,
 vengeance which shall find thee,
 Crushing thy false spirit,
 scathing thy fair limb:--
 O yet thunders, deafen, O ye lightnings
 blind me;
 Winds and storms from heaven,
 strike me but spare him!
 (11.33-36)

From where Zara stands, openness to life, particularly emotional vulnerability, breeds pain and guilt. Immunity from these is to be found only in the ultimate withdrawal of self-destruction.

"Isadora" treats of the same involvement-detachment theme, but here the issue is framed in theological terms. The love between wife and husband in this poem has not soured or turned to the bitterness of betrayal. On the contrary, its deep-moving, almost irresistible influence is what Isadora fears:

Love whom I have loved too well,
 Turn thy face away from me:
 For I heed nor heaven nor hell
 While mine eyes can look on thee.
 Do not answer, do not speak,
 For thy voice can make me weak.
 (11.1-6)

She envies the innocent baby in her arms, for the child, she allows, knows nothing of the burden of having to choose "the heart's death for the soul's life":

All thy thoughts are what they seem,
 Very pure and very still;
 And thou fearest not the voice
 That once made thy heart rejoice.
 (11.45-48)

Yet she, with her adult consciousness of good and evil, feels compelled to choose "'twixt God and Man". When she has succeeded in sending her beloved away against his will, she feels "a slow chill" invading her life-blood. Death is imminent. Thus, giving up the priceless treasure of human love is tantamount to suicide, but nonetheless an ethical imperative for Isadora. Even the ideal reciprocal love of husband and

wife is sinful. Whatever affectionate ties bind us to life in the world of the flesh are obstacles to our spiritual salvation.

These are, of course, three separate poems, and their effect is fragmentary, exploratory--an imaginative but tentative probing of several emotional attitudes. If we look at a poem written only slightly later, in 1850, we observe many of the same emotional elements but see the poet now developing a formal technique to bring these fragmentary elements into a more integrated relationship. In "Three Nuns", dramatic interaction between the characters is still lacking and there is little in the style of the three monologues to distinguish the speakers as unique persons. But this is perhaps as it should be, since in this composite poem, as in the more fully developed sister poems, there is reason to suspect that on one level the separate characters are in fact the same person. The multiple personae reflect conflicting impulses or attitudes which are struggling for recognition, and sometimes for supremacy in that single person.

William Michael Rossetti provides a history of the poem in his note pertaining to it in The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti. The second or middle section was evidently written initially to stand by itself. Later, the first and third sections were added, as were the Italian superscriptions or mottoes, and the whole composition was inserted into the prose tale Maude, with the observation, 'Pray read the mottoes; put together they form a most exquisite little song which the nuns sing in Italy'.⁴ William includes in his note a prose translation of this "little song":

This heart sighs, and I know not wherefore,
 It may be sighing for love, but to me it
 says not so. Answer me, my heart, wherefore
 sighest thou? It answers: I want God--I
 sigh for Jesus.

The second and central monologue begins on a note of angry, almost self-righteous protest. The speaker is anxiously trying to justify her feeling of love for another human being:

I loved him; yes, where was the sin?
 I loved him with my heart and soul;
 But I pressed forward to no goal,
 There was no prize I strove to win.

 I loved him but I never sought
 That he should know that I was fair.
 I prayed for him; was my sin prayer?
 (11.64-67, 70-72)

In her search for a morally justifiable way of loving, one untainted by self-interest or sin, the emotion becomes entirely trapped, locked within the self. It is denied any outlet or expression except in prayer, and still the speaker feels a heavy weight of condemnation upon her, against which she cries out in self-defense. Overcome with weariness, she longs for Death's release:

O sweet is death, for I am weak
 And weary, and it giveth rest.
 The crucifix lies on my breast,
 And all night long it seems to speak
 Of rest; I hear it through my sleep,
 And the great comfort makes me weep.
 (11.88-93)

As with Isadora the act of renouncing any hope of mutual fulfillment in a human love relationship, the moral necessity of detachment from the world, divests life of all its colour and appeal for the second nun.

In the first section of the poem, the speaker listens to a happy song-bird outside her window grate, and nostalgically calls to mind her own innocent Immalee-like childhood, before the advent of moral consciousness brought about her alienation from the natural world.

The third nun, in a series of elaborate and evocative metaphors, pictures the deep longings that are stirring within her. Innocent joyous participation in life is far behind her. Accepting her fallen state, she has voluntarily cut herself off from all worldly pleasures, and has trained her gaze upon an unseen world of promised fulfillment:

While still the names rang in mine ears
 Of Daughter, sister, wife,
 The outside world still looked so fair
 To my weak eyes, and rife
 With beauty, my heart almost failed;
 (11.195-199)

Now, however, these disturbing recollections have faded, and the speaker, like the first and second nun, is overcome by a restless yearning to be set free in death. She likens her soul to a caged song-bird, fluttering against its prison bars, a fountain "shut in by clammy clay"(11.132), and thirsts feverishly for the water of the Living Well and the grapes of the True Vine growing in Paradise. The latter is the sacred plant "Whose tendrils join the Tree of Life / To that which maketh wise" (11.138). Somewhere, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil are thus married, and wisdom does not demand the negation of what is so fair and rife with beauty.

The unity of this trio of "sisters" is not the bond of blood, but the common decision to take religious vows which would remove them from the world, from its ambiguities and temptations to sin.

The poems present a number of subtle emotions and attitudes--three faces of renunciation. It is as if the agonized spirit starts along several different paths, looking for meaning and fulfillment, but in each case, trapped in a labyrinth of rigid moral assumptions, it arrives at the same dark doorway. This unity in despair reminds one of another much shorter lyric which belongs in a general sense to the sister group. It is simply entitled "Song" and is dated November, 1848, just a few months before "Three Nuns" was begun:

She sat and sang alway
 By the green margin of a stream,
 Watching the fishes leap and play
 Beneath the glad sunbeam.

I sat and wept alway
 Beneath the moon's most shadowy beam
 Watching the blossoms of the May
 Weep leaves into the stream.

I wept for memory;
 She sang for hope that is so fair:
 My tears were swallowed by the sea;
 Her songs died on the air.

The songs of the happy singer in this piece embody the child-like innocent vision of life which, as the speaker bears witness, cannot survive into mature experience. The carefree child, or true innocent, does not yet grasp the mystery of that seed of corruption which taints human consciousness and bars man from the paradise of the nonhuman. The weeper, in contrast, sheds tears for memory as the blossoms weep leaves into the stream. Memory implies the blight of experience which teaches us that the love of what flowers and ripens here in this world must draw us at last down to the earth in the season of withering and decay.

In both the foregoing poems the pervading assumption seems to be

that if man has once grasped a spiritual dimension in his existence, a "higher calling", he must never more allow himself to be nourished and delighted by the world into which he was born. It is a dangerous delusion to suppose, as the first nun did in her childhood, that a human being can match the water-lily, staying pure and unstained, yet drawing life-giving nourishment through its roots from the black waters on which it lies "like light"(11.56). The spiritual meaning which man finds in his life is set in opposition to his sense of belonging in the world. It does not permeate his continuity with nature, but rather cuts him off from the natural. The world of matter, flesh and even human interaction, cannot be conceived as itself a medium of spiritual energy and influence:

My soul is as a hidden fount
 Shut in by clammy clay
 That struggles with an upward moan,
 Striving to force its way
 Up through the turf, over the grass,
 Up up into the day.
 ("Three Nuns", 11.131-136)

And such images of the aridity of life are to recur frequently in Rossetti's poems.

In "Three Nuns" the final resting place is a foregone conclusion. We glimpse a range of emotions and impulses, past and present, which are reconciled in the outward act of choosing the cloister. In the later sister poems, however, the conflicting impulses and attitudes freely confront one another, sometimes, though not always, resolving the conflict. Occasionally, as in "The Lowest Room", an overt or practical resolution is achieved, but there is an honest admission that the desire for inner peace has by no means been satisfied. The intra-psychic struggle continues,

and with it the infection of feelings with the poison of guilt and resentment.

"The Lowest Room" is perhaps the first fully developed sister poem of any length. It was composed earlier than "Goblin Market", "Maidensong", "Noble Sisters" or "Sister Maude", and in style it is the most naturalistic, so much so as to be rather commonplace and drab in tone, for it is utterly lacking in the colourful phantasy of the poems for which we most remember Rossetti.

Its dramatic personae are two sisters pursuing the domestic activities familiar to young ladies of Rossetti's own day, and indeed, embodying some conventional social attitudes. The younger is the epitome of sweet, passive, forbearing femininity:

For mild she was, of few soft words,
Most gentle, easy to be led,
Content to listen when I spoke,
And reverence what I said.
(11.161-164)

She cannot fathom the causes of the older girl's unrest with the life of passivity and moderation. Beyond her ken is the intense frustration which leads her sister to explode in angry protest against the "shame" of "our aimless life"(1.81) frittered away in dull domesticity. The older girl's imagination is fired by romantic dreams of adventure and passion. She longs for experiences that would test her mettle, call forth extremes of courage, of love, of passionate commitment to important causes. This quality of life she thinks she sees in the epics of Homer--a golden age when "night had holiness of night, and day was sacred day"(11.71,72). The sacredness or holiness which she longs for has little or nothing to

do with circumspect piety or comfortable religiosity. It has still less to do with rigorous other-worldly asceticism. It is a special vibrant quality, an intensity of feeling which could render all life's moments significant and luminous--the religious, the heroic, but also the plainly secular:

'Calm in the utmost stress of doom,
Devout toward adverse powers above,
They hated with intenser hate,
And loved with fuller love.

'Then heavenly beauty could allay
As heavenly beauty stirred the strife:
By them a slave was worshipped more
Than is by us a wife.'
(11.57-64)

Ultimately, however, the older sister, the speaker, is soundly chastened by the younger girl's gentle reproof. She acknowledges her sister's moral superiority, although she inwardly both resents and envies the younger sister's spontaneous virtue and grace. Moreover, the speaker must watch her sister reap her rewards, the love and contentment of married life which are denied the older girl:

While I? I sat alone and watched;
My lot in life, to live alone
In mine own world of interests,
Much felt but little shown.
(11.261-264)

She claims, at the end of the piece, to have accepted the lesson, "stubborn to digest"(1.220), of her sister's "higher birthright"(1.217). Yet she longs for a final righting of the scales,

When all deep secrets shall be shown,
And many last be first.
(11.279-280)

There is a deep pathos about the attitude of the speaker in "The Lowest Room". One feels in it a desperate attempt to be honest, to acknowledge the conflicting drives in the personality. The emotions of the speaker would not be so confused--such a strange mixture of admiration, envy, contempt, guilt, and frustration--if the values which the younger sister exemplifies were not strong, even dominant, in the older girl's more complex nature as well. These shared values are those which provide the criterion for her assessment of her own worth, and as long as this is so, genuine self-acceptance is precluded. The speaker consoles herself in the faint hope that a different measuring standard may prevail in the life to come, for this life on earth has revealed itself as an empty and painful trial to be born in a spirit of martyrdom.

Despite the final condemnation and subordination of any qualities of character which seemed too passionate, too adventuresome or immodest to fit Victorian standards of femininity, it is interesting to note that Dante Gabriel was offended by what he regarded as the "falsetto muscularity" of "The Lowest Room". So unbecoming to Christina did he feel this characteristic, that he regretted the publication of the poem, and admonished her for letting such a tone creep into her writing. William Michael quotes Gabriel's letter to Christina in the note pertaining to "The Lowest Room":⁵

If I were you, I would keep guard on this matter if you write in the future; and ultimately exclude from your writings everything (or almost everything) so tainted.

William Michael comments that Christina did not agree with criticism entirely, but later in her life seemed a little more inclined to accept

it as just. However, she did retain "The Lowest Room" in succeeding editions of her poems. One can feel from this little episode the kinds of pressure felt by women artists in Rossetti's time, and the way in which such pressure to conform to a particular womanly ideal may have made self-integration a very difficult goal to achieve.⁶

The final "resolution" of "The Lowest Room", with its restrictive moral assumptions tends to leave the modern reader dissatisfied, but one can observe that even here the sister pattern is beginning to provide a framework for separating out and examining various impulses and motives within the personality. The later poems "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" were published in the first edition of Goblin Market. To Weathers these pieces suggest "a schizophrenic bisectioning of the personality".⁷ The dramatic situation is one of intense and hostile emotional confrontation between two sisters. The hostile feelings remain unresolved in both poems and are given the irrevocable and concrete form in each case of a curse by one sister upon the other. In discussing the two-fold self-division implicit in these poems, Weathers employs the Nietzschean terms "Apollonian" and "Dionysian".⁸ He sees in one sister the manifestation of the universal Apollonian principle which tends to restrain and confine life energies within rigid forms, social and moral distinctions, rational schemes. The other sister is the expression of the "ecstatic", that which explodes existing forms and categories, whose passionate vitality must overflow personal boundaries, limitations and distinctions.

In "Noble Sisters" a cold, haughty figure owns that she has deliberately intercepted a series of signs and messages sent to her sister by a lover. Finally she confesses to having turned away the suiter

himself with a fabricated story that her sister had betrayed him to wed someone else. The sister responds in anger and despair:

'Fie, sister, fie, a wicked lie!
 A lie, a wicked lie!
 I have none other love but him,
 Nor will have till I die.
 And you have turned him from our door,
 And stabbed him with a lie:
 I will go seek him thro' the world
 In sorrow till I die.'
 (11.48-56)

The reply is one of severe moral reproach:

'Go seek in sorrow, sister,
 And find in sorrow, too:
 If thus you shame our father's name
 My curse go forth with you.'
 (11.57-60)

In "Sister Maude", however, the direction of the curse is reversed. The lovelorn girl curses the interfering sister:

'But sister Maude, O sister Maude,
 Bide YOU with death and sin.'
 (11.19-20)

In each case, the wall of cold hostility is of adamant hardness. There is no hope of reconciliation. For reasons that remain vague, the union of the would-be lovers would bring shame upon the household. This is utterly unthinkable to the sister who has adopted the role of censor or moral guardian of the other. Yet the resultant deprivation suffered by the distraught girl, who has lost her chance of fulfillment in love, is so bitter that her life becomes hateful to her, and her regard for the restraining sister is completely destroyed.

The emotions vented in both the above poems are potent, as Rossetti herself was keenly aware, and because of their unchristian flavour, she requested that they be omitted from succeeding editions of Goblin Market. Biographical and historical critics, eager for clues to unlock the secret of Rossetti's emotional life, especially her romantic love life, have sought for a possible parallel in the relationship between Christina Rossetti and her own sister Maria. Some writers, Gosse and Packer among them, have noted a contrast between Christina's softer, more affectionate nature and the more stern, inflexible character of the eldest Rossetti. They believe that Maria may have exercised a censorious and confining influence upon her sensitive and less stable younger sister, if only by the severe example of her own piety and moral rigidity. Perhaps Maria's saintly resoluteness provided the foil for certain characteristics, real or imagined, which Christina recognized in herself as signs of moral laxness, or weakness of character. The contrast may thus have increased her anxiety and guilt respecting her own vulnerability to the appeal of things worldly. However, we do not need a real-life Maria to appreciate the mythic and structural importance that sisterhood assumes in dealing with the sometimes unresolvable conflicts of human personality in these poems.

The divisions or polarities which the sister poems suggest do not remain constant from poem to poem. The number of sisters changes, as do the perspectives on life, or the conflicting impulses which they seem to embody. One cannot arrive at a consistent allegorical reading of such poems, even by ranging side by side those which present a common number of sister figures. The somewhat emblematic and depersonalized

figures in the fourteen-line poem "A Triad" are vividly distinct from one another, but they do not bear a strictly one-to-one relationship to the figures in the longer three-figure sister poems such as "Maidensong" and "Goblin Market". In fact, two separate characters that appear in the shorter poem merge into a single one of the "Goblin Market" sisters:

Three sang of love together: one with lips
Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,
Flushed to the yellow hair and finger-tips;
And one there sang who soft and smooth as snow
Bloomed like a tinted hyacinth at a show,
And one was blue with famine after love,
Who like a harpstring snapped rang harsh
and low
The burden of what those were singing of.
(11.1-8)

The first crimson-lipped singer, "with cheeks and bosom in a glow/ flushed to the yellow hair and finger tips", suggests Laura in the transports of her sensuous feast on forbidden fruit. In like manner, the third singer, "blue with famine after love" like the pining princess in "The Prince's Progress", also suggests Laura in her subsequent agonies. Lizzie seems quite left out of the triad configuration, while the second singer, who grows "gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife", bears little or no resemblance to any of the sisters in the longer poem. (An ironic but unkind parallel might be drawn between this last singer's sweet moderation, her blooming "like a tinted hyacinth at a show", and the conventional domestic bliss enjoyed by the sisters at the close of "Goblin Market". Such a reading would be an utter travesty of the poet's intentions, but would fall nicely in line with Curran's derogatory evaluation of the end of "Goblin Market".)⁹

From the several examples cited already, it can be seen that the sister structure is frequently exploited as a means of staging an imaginative dialogue, or even a parliament of shifting and conflicting impulses. In each case, it represents a particular tentative and exploratory organization of personal feelings, more than a crystallized division of the self into two or more personalities inside one skin, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But the symbolism of sisterhood is most fully developed in the phantasy narrative poems. "Goblin Market" owes much to this basic structure, and the later less complex poem "Maidensong" also uses it effectively. These longer poems provide evidence that for Rossetti the sister image of personhood is potentially a more hopeful one than some of the analagous image patterns which we have noticed elsewhere in her poetry, such as the betrothal or hetero-sexual love motif, the north-south polarities, or the sea and shore symbolism. Certain positive attributes pertain to sisterhood that cannot be counted upon in the erotic love relationship, for example. The unity of lovers depends upon keeping faith, and upon the constancy of human emotions or feelings which often prove fragile, transient and unequal to the test. The unity of blood kinship, on the other hand, is the given fact of blood kinship, the inescapable biological imprint of common genealogy. For lovers who take physical and spiritual leave of one another, complete estrangement is a very real threat. If they symbolize divisive factions in an unstable personality, the prospect is one of true despair--total and irreparable self-alienation:

As the dew leaves not a trace
on the green earth's face;
I, no trace

On thy face.
 ("Confluent", 11.21-24)

For alienated sisters, however, there remains amid conflict and hostility the common blood coursing through their veins. Offspring of a single womb, they must still acknowledge that the secret life unfolding in their innermost beings flows from one source. This is true, not as a matter of chance or choice, but as a given constant of their existence, deep as life itself.

Rossetti's sisters in the longer poems are look-alikes, a fact which underlines the irrevocable unity even in diversity which is an essential element in the poet's conception of sisterhood. In contrast to the well-known folk tale, "Snow White and Rose Red", there are no striking differences in physical appearance. The maidens of Rossetti's phantasies are rather like prismatic reflections of one another, as one passage from "Goblin Market" makes clear:

Golden head by golden head,
 Like two pigeons in one nest
 Folded in each other's wings,
 They lay down in their curtained bed:
 Like two blossoms on one stem,
 Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
 Like two wands of ivory
 Tipped with gold for awful kings.

 Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
 Locked together in one nest.
 (11.184-191, 197-198)

In "Maidensong", a distinction of degree is made between the trio of sisters, but Meggan and May seem only slightly duskier reflections of the exquisite Margaret, whose beauty outshines that of the other two.

The shape of two sister narratives is similar. They are strikingly alike in their happy conclusions: sisters who have somehow managed to get separated from each other are at last brought back together in a full and satisfying reconciliation. The happy reconciliation in "Maidensong" is precipitated by the beautiful singing of Margaret's song which binds all things together in a redemptive harmony. In "Goblin Market" Laura recites a story to her children, gathered around. Her tale is part of a lesson in sisterly love, and is essentially a skeletal recapitulation of the whole "Goblin Market" narrative. Some readers have found this homely, moralistic touch graceless and anti-climactic--a descent from the magical to the maudlin. Curran's picturesque response reflects his general distrust of Rossetti's sense of aesthetic proportion:

The powerful implications of this fable of sensual possession are resolved into a panegyric for sisterly love, and what begins as a startling complement to Poe and Baudelaire settles stiffly into a Victorian parlor.¹⁰

Certainly there are more subtle moral and psychological insights woven into the fabric of the phantasy than the homespun virtue of good family relations, but it is quite fitting that they should not disrupt the innocent fairytale quality of the poem and intrude upon the reader as sophisticated, conscious double meanings. Moreover, the final touch focusses the reader's gaze on the hopeful image of loving, reconciled sisterhood, with its symbolic suggestion of inner harmony, the achievement of which is after all a central theme of the poem. It clearly shifts the emphasis from the bitter after-taste of sensual indulgence which some have misconstrued to be the main issue of the poem.

"Goblin Market" does of course have a dark and frightening side.

In contrast to "Maidensong" it takes a much closer look at the deep causes of self-division. It does so by creating for the reader an almost tangible imaginative world replete with both human and supernatural inhabitants, and tracing therein the disturbing adventures of two young maids, Lizzie and Laura.

The sisters live on the margin of a wood which is haunted regularly by the threatening, shadowy goblin men. Thus far they have eluded the goblins by means of simple avoidance, a tactic which serves Lizzie well, but which is fast losing effectiveness where Laura's more responsive nature is concerned. Laura's defenses are crumbling before the pressure of growing curiosity. She is magnetically drawn toward a forbidden sector of experience:

Laura reared her glossy head,
And whispered like the restless brook:
'Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men.
One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,
One lugs a golden dish
Of many pounds' weight.
How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Through those fruit bushes.'
(11.52-63)

What are these goblin creatures? What appealing temptation do their orchard fruits represent, and what does succumbing to that temptation mean? The traditional associations of "forbidden fruit" with sexual temptation can hardly be ignored, especially when the goblins are described in distinctly masculine terms, and their voices sound "kind and full of loves/ In the pleasant weather"(11.79-80). When trying to

seduce Lizzie into tasting their wares, the queer little brothers hug, kiss, squeeze and caress her.

Such details have influenced critics like Lona Mosk Packer to regard the poem as primarily a powerful condemnation of sensuality:

"Goblin Market" celebrates by condemning sensuous passion. Seldom in nineteenth century poetry has the lure of the senses been so convincingly portrayed.¹¹

Packer discusses the link between Nature and evil that is implicit in Rossetti's poetry and her religious prose writings as well:

The joys of the earthly paradise must be renounced if one is to achieve spiritual redemption. The lusciousness of the forbidden fruit and the charm of the little animal-faced goblins are but different aspects of nature, the core of which is sexual passion.¹²

This assumed connection is relevant to the root of the self-division which "Goblin Market" explores, though perhaps Packer over-dramatizes the significance of sexual passion in the case against Nature. It would seem that it is the inherent evil of Nature which taints sexuality, rather than the reverse.

Weathers sees a different symbolic meaning in the strange goblin merchants. Their shadowy half-reality, their mysterious comings and goings suggest to him a temptation of an inner psychological kind--to withdraw from public reality and immerse oneself in a private dream world. Weathers understands the maidens in the story as a single soul divided in commitment between illusion and reality. He paraphrases the essential statement he believes is implicit in "Goblin Market" thus:

". . . one part of me is dead and lost forever, the victim of believing too much in the dream and visionary world. My task is to preserve what

remains of me, to hold what remains of me in an adult unity of being."¹³

Weathers and Packer are working within quite different schemes of interpretation. The former sees in the goblins an inner world of illusion and subjectivity; the latter connects them with nature and sexual passion. Yet both provide valuable partial insights into the total scope of the poem. The goblin temptation certainly seems to have something to do with human response to what is appealing and well nigh irresistible in the natural world. At the same time, there is something inner and subjective about it, a special kind of frightened retreat from the real which is evident in Laura's and Lizzie's initial outlook on life, and which in itself heightens the potential evil in that which it blindly fears. These separate dimensions of the symbolism of the poem fuse gradually as the narrative unfolds.

From the very beginning there is a strong suggestion that seeds of the evil which threatens to ruin Laura and Lizzie, seemingly through the agency of the goblins, are actually already inherent in their spiritual condition and are finding expression in their radically conflicting attitudes toward experience. The effect of the poem as a whole is to affirm a more mature integration of the personality which could give rise to a different and more adequate way of interacting with the human and material world around one.

In one sense, "Goblin Market" commences after, not before the girls' fall from innocence. Lizzie and Laura are already intensely conscious of distinctions between Good and Evil. There is already a deep rift beginning to show itself in their emotional responses to the clear-cut "must not's" of their youthful existence. Laura feels hemmed

in, cheated, and longs to include the new and strange in her experience, to taste the world's unfamiliar fruits. She wants to trust in the evidence of their beauty, their fragrance, their healthy glow, that their origin is good, not evil. Lizzie, on the other hand, accepts unquestioningly the chilling authoritarian "must not". It outweighs all other considerations. In the face of what seems to threaten she is prone to make a hasty retreat, to block out sensible consciousness of the thing feared, with no attempt to understand what the actual danger is, how it might be dealt with to her greater advantage. She will renounce any sort of innocent pleasure to obtain security from possible moral risk. No cost is too severe. Already on the retreat at the first hint of dusk, she is perhaps too happy to forego the perfectly natural delights of the twilit glade. Her breadth and enjoyment of experience are drastically limited in order to keep the world at arm's length.

In even more exaggerated forms, this state of mind is common in Rossetti's writing. Fear of the uncontrollable, the alien out-there, and the unknown, dark side of the self, is a recurrent mood in Rossetti. Under its baleful influence, the mind plays strange tricks on itself. Nightmare shapes and grotesque faces grin out of every shadow, and haunt the half-closed closets of even the most orderly bed chamber. Whenever the atmosphere is one of rejection of the moral and psychological risks of loving engagement with the world and its inhabitants, counter impulses which are being subdued are likely to fight back with a fantastic array of surrealistic apparitions to trouble the mind in the half-dark:

So I grew half delirious and quite sick,
And through the darkness saw strange faces
grin

Of monsters at me. One put forth a fin,
 And touched me clammily. I could not pick
 A quarrel with it: it began to lick
 My hand, making meanwhile a piteous din,
 And shedding human tears: it would begin
 To near me, then retreat . . .
 ("A Bout-Rimes Sonnet", 11.1-8)

All of Rossetti's hair-raising friends from ghostland, her distorted dream playmates like the finny affectionate amphibian of "A Bout-Rimes Sonnet", are imaginative products of a mind torn by inner war:

. . . I heard the quick
 Pulsation of my heart, I marked the fight
 Of life and death within me. Then sleep threw
 Her veil around me; but this thing is true.
 When I awoke the sun was at his height;
 And I wept sadly, knowing that one new
 Creature had love for me, and others spite.
 (11.8-14)

Are the unsettling wonders of animate creation to be shunned and despised, or lovingly accepted? Cold fear can surely transform even the relatively harmless into grinning, hissing monsters set upon dragging man into league with the Devil. Yet even in the fear, there is love intermixed. Perhaps all of life is really worth cherishing. Even the inevitable pain of involvement with the world, stinging sometimes like poison in the blood, is part of one's spiritual journey, and serves to deepen and intensify one's awareness of being alive.

Lizzie and Laura's goblins are similarly emanations of an inner war, and they too are characteristically night creatures. It is at the weary day's end, when dusk falls, that the goblin music invades the consciousness of the girls. During the brisk mornings and golden afternoons prior to Laura's "fall", both maidens have kept their minds and

hands busy with a score of simple tasks to which duty prompts them. There is honey to fetch, there are cows to mind, a house to set in order, cakes to knead, butter to churn and cream to whip, all of which leave little time for glad basking in the delights of the natural world that surround them. Any gratuitous indulgence of the appetite for sensuous beauty and pleasure, any unguarded looking and listening, would be frowned upon and deemed "not good for maidens"(1.144) according to the simple philosophy on which Lizzie bases her "wise upbraidings"(1.142).

All day long the sun shines down upon Laura and Lizzie, "neat like bees, as sweet and busy"(1.201), occupying their thoughts "as modest maidens should"(1.209). But at dusk the scene changes. Shadows with a deep secret life of their own begin to crowd in around the edges of thought, disturbing their peace of mind. Involuntarily, their half-slumbering senses become alive to a strange and compelling music--the cry of the goblins:

She heard a voice like voice of doves
Cooing all together:
They sounded kind and full of loves
In the pleasant weather.
(11.77-80)

The maidens' only defense against the strong pull that its cadences exercise upon them is to "thrust a dimpled finger/ in each ear, shut eyes, and run"(11.68-69).

At least part of the spell-binding power of the goblins' cry may stem from the fact that in Lizzie's and Laura's world, all ripe fruit, joyous feasting, and fulfillment of sensuous impulses seem to fall into the goblins' shady domain. This suggests an ordering of experience which

is seriously off centre. The resulting imbalance in the personality has dire consequences. The attempt to block out an awareness of the natural appetites which tie us into the world, to ignore the "tingling cheeks and finger tips"(1.39), may have the effect of locking powerful impulses deep inside one, where, deprived of sunlight and air, they undergo frightening transformations.

This is the grotesque shadow realm of the goblins. Natural responsiveness to the appeals of the senses is forced into a subterranean existence: its expression becomes a night activity, when, under cover of darkness, balked desires press to the surface of consciousness in sensual dreams and guilt-ridden phantasies. The sensuous appetite in this unhealthy condition is like the kernel stone which Laura carries home from the feast and plants deep in the ground. Buried thus, the kernel grows no real fruit. It never comes in contact with the life-giving sun, and is watered only with tears. Hence it yields only troubling mirages of fulfillment:

It never saw the sun,
It never felt the trickling moisture run:
While with sunk eyes and faded mouth
She dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth. . . .
(11.286-290)

The kernel stone, Laura's feverish dreams, the goblins and their fragrant freight must all alike be hidden from daylight, and one cannot help wondering if it is the dim light, the flickering shadows that distort things and render them grotesque. Consider the goblins themselves, for example. Would one of the frisky creatures firmly laid hold on and set in the sunlight inspire any more fear or repugnance than the whiskered

pussycat he suspiciously resembles, even in the gloom?

In a striking way, the sinister vision of these sisters, first tempted, then besieged by the grotesque goblins, is a surrealistic inversion of the healthy and beautiful relationship between the "Maidensong" sisters and the adoring creatures, furry, feathered and finned, who pay them court, and to whom they open their tender hearts trustingly. The parallel is underlined by the goblins' obvious resemblance to little forest birds and animals.

In the children's phantasy, The Princess and the Goblin, George MacDonald provides a suggestive account of the ancestry of his race of goblins, and how they evolved into their present form. The symbolic potential of his goblin history sheds light upon Rossetti's earlier more fanciful use of goblins, and the meaning of goblinness. The mountains of MacDonald's story are full of "hollow places, huge caverns and winding ways, some with water running through them and some shining with all colours of the rainbow when a light was taken in":

Now in these subterranean caverns lived a strange race of beings, called by some gnomes, by some kobolds, by some goblins. There was a legend current in the country that at one time they lived above ground and were very like other people. But for some reason or other, concerning which there were different legendary theories, the king had laid what they thought too severe taxes upon them, or required observances of them they did not like, or had begun to treat them with more severity in some way or other, and to impose stricter laws; and the consequence was that they had all disappeared from the face of the country. According to the legend, however, instead of going to some other country they had all taken refuge in the subterranean caverns, whence they never came out but at night, and then seldom showed themselves in any numbers and never to many people at once. It was only in the least frequented and most difficult parts of the mountains that they were said to gather, even at night in the open air. Those who had caught sight of any of them said that they had greatly altered in the course of generations; and no wonder, seeing they lived away from the sun, in cold and wet and dark places. They were now, not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form. There was no invention, they said, of the most

lawless imagination expressed by pen or pencil, that could surpass the extravagance of their appearance. And as they grew misshapen in body, they had grown in knowledge and cleverness and now were able to do things no mortal could see the possibility of. But as they grew in cunning, they grew in mischief, and their great delight was in every way they could think of to annoy the people who lived in the open-air story above them.¹⁴

The origin of Rossetti's goblins was not perhaps very different. It is quite predictable that when the ascendent order in the kingdom of the soul is world-negating and levies over-severe taxes through the oppressive laws of a stringent asceticism, a powerful counter force will arm itself to resist the unnatural oppressor. The resistance activity will occur, not in the open, but in the secret places of the self, where the abused element may at least temporarily escape surveillance. But the struggle to preserve what instinct argues is natural, good and beautiful does not often succeed in such cases. The next time that the two opposing forces and their now separate worlds collide with one another, it becomes evident that what may have begun as natural, beautiful, even holy, has suffered a nightmarish metamorphosis into the demonic, the ugly, the unholy. "Goblin Market" traces the history of such a collision of worlds, and hints that a re-integration of them may be possible through love and courage.

The unfolding of the psychological drama of the novel I Never Promised You a Rose Garden which follows the course of the slow recovery from mental illness of a sixteen year-old girl, has some interesting symbolic parallels with Rossetti's phantasy narrative. For complicated reasons relating to her cultural and family background, her precocity and her over-protective mother, the central character of the novel comes to believe during her childhood, that she is "not of the world". Deborah

Blau's sense of fear, distrust and isolation eventually give birth to a compensatory interior world called "Yr". All the colour and depth and beauty of the real world with which she grows ever more out of touch are drained away, usurped by Yr and its fantastic, magical inhabitants. For a time, she retreats to Yr to escape the gray, cold flatness of the life she comes to regard as her immutable fate in the outside world. Her withdrawal is almost total, and psychiatric care commences under a gifted and loving doctor. As the doctor labours to help her bring interior and exterior reality in touch with each other, her defense system begins to disintegrate, and the "Censor", a psychic persona whose function is to keep the worlds separate, asserts itself as a harsh, cruel tyrant in both regions. All hell breaks loose within her when she commits the unforgivable sin, that of giving away the secrets of Yr to an "earth person". Yet, this cross fertilization, as the doctor helps Deborah learn, this relation of Yr contents to the exterior world, is the only hope of recovering mental wholeness. In her progress toward health, one milestone is the restoration of colour, depth and sensuous appeal to the real world, after which it grows easier for Deborah to entertain the thought of giving up Yr.

The sense that she is, and must remain "other" is gradually replaced by the exciting, heady joy of experiencing "consubstantiality" with earth life. The deep caring and the capacity to suffer for and with Deborah which the doctor manifests, are the first intimations that reach her, through the fog of fear and hurt, that she might have any bond with the real world.

At several points, the pattern of Deborah Blau's illness and

recovery, the inner landscape of her spiritual struggles, bears an interesting similarity to the symbolic events of "Goblin Market". The goblin world, like Deborah's Yr, offers alluring compensations for the deficiencies of the real world, or the legitimate daytime world acknowledged by the over-cautious Lizzie and Laura. A person who believes that the world must be shunned for fear of contamination may develop psychological defenses to divest the world of its warmth, colour and appeal, but the colour and power thus drained from the public world will find a new and secret medium through which to approach the hungry and thirsting victim. Thus the tinctures and fragrances which adorn the supernatural goblin world are the rightful hues of human experience, and the natural appetites which crave them could be naturally satisfied if only the fear of consubstantiality and interaction with the world were not so strong.

This complicated relationship between goblinness and reality is hinted at throughout the poem. Laura's first exciting encounter with the queer merchants provides a clue. The episode is not very frightening. The goblins prove to be fun-loving, friendly and generous, though somewhat bold. Although she has paid with products of her own body, a curl and a tear, for the pleasure she has shared with them, Laura takes her leave in a euphoric glow, too full of delight to experience guilt or anxiety. So far, the goblin world has been good to her, for she has so far agreed to respect the prime taboo. All feasting is to be done on the spot, with the goblins. No fruit may be carried home to the real world. No trafficking between worlds. (This taboo is almost universal in fairy and folk lore. Keightley's Fairy Mythology is full of accounts of the evil that befell legendary folk who found their way in and out of fairyland,

and tried to carry articles belonging to the wee folk across the magic boundary of that other world.)

So far the categories of experience have been kept discrete. But the satisfaction thus derived cannot last. The very mechanism which the personality has developed to cope with the suffering of its alienated sensuous, pleasure-loving component, itself perpetuates the self-division which is at the root of the disease. While Laura is eating her fill, Lizzie is waiting close at hand, ready with her "wise upbraidings". The picture which follows of the sisters' peaceful and beautiful oneness in sleep, is like a haunting and nostalgic glimpse of a lost paradise which comes as a mirage to the wanderer in the wilderness. The harsh reality to which the girls must awaken has little or no residue of this at-oneness to show.

By the next day, a frightening new situation begins to emerge. Alarmed by Laura's vulnerability to temptation, the cautious Lizzie grows even more determined to resist the goblin lure. Meanwhile a great famine, an agony of balked desire, overtakes Laura, causing her to "droop from the root", like the love-starved princess in "The Prince's Progress". Lizzie catches the sound of the fruit call, but it does not reach Laura's eager ears. When the sisters are seen as a single personality, it is as if Lizzie, the watchful superego, intercepts, censors or absorbs the call. No more chances must be taken. Conversely, Laura's tortured realization that, though she can no longer hear the fruit call, it still works its magic upon other ears has about it the bitter taste of the "noble sacrifice" which is made involuntarily. Laura is the cheated lover of "Noble Sisters", whose world has become an arid wilderness overnight,

because the moralistic, inhibiting forces in her life have asserted their dominance with a vengeance. Frustration festers into despair:

Day after day, night after night,
 Laura kept watch in vain
 In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
 She never caught again the goblin cry,
 'Come buy, come buy; '--
 She never spied the goblin men
 Hawking their fruits along the glen:
 But when the noon waxed bright
 Her hair grew thin and grey;
 She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
 To swift decay and burn
 Her fire away.

(11.269-280)

In Lizzie's waking presence, Laura maintains a stony silence. Only when she is free from her sister's surveillance does she give vent to the intensity of her suffering:

She said not one word in her heart's sore ache:
 But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
 Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
 So crept to bed, and lay
 Silent till Lizzie slept:
 Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
 And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept
 As if her heart would break.

(11.261-268)

Here again, there is alternation rather than interaction. The opposing impulses or emotional stances must never consciously co-exist in the waking mind.

If Lizzie and Laura are taken to be complementary fragments of one personality, of which only part is illumined, and part in deep shadow at any given time, it is interesting to note that the whole which the parts add up to, bears a resemblance in some particulars to William

Michael Rossetti's description of the poet, herself. He concludes the Memoir which is part of his edition of his sister's collected poems with a brief discussion of her personality and interests. He touches on both "innate" and acquired traits:

In innate character she was vivacious, and open to pleasurable impressions; and, during her girlhood, one might readily have supposed that she would develop into a woman of expansive heart, fond of society and diversions, and taking a part in them of more than average brilliancy. What came to pass was of course quite the contrary. In this result ill-health and an early blight to the affections told for much; for much also an exceeding sensitiveness of conscience, acted upon by the strictest conception in religion.¹⁵

He does not refrain from mentioning what he regards as "the one serious flaw" in her character:

Scrupulosity may be a virtue; over-scrupulosity is at any rate a semi-virtue, but it has, to my thinking, the full practical bearings of a defect. It is more befitting for a nunnery than for London streets. It weakens the mind, straitens the temperament and character, chills the impulse and the influence. Over-scrupulosity made Christina Rossetti shut up her mind to almost all things save the Bible, as viewed by Anglo-Catholicism. Her temperament and character, naturally warm and free, became 'a fountain sealed'.¹⁶

If "scrupulosity" succeeded in stifling "elan and impulse" in almost every area of life, William reports that in poetic performance "the most extreme spontaneity always remained".¹⁷ A reading of her own letters suggests that impulse and spontaneity survived in her poetry because of her firm faith in poetic inspiration or intuition--the gift quality of artistic creativity. If poetry is truly a "gift", it is dissociated from the sinful self, and can be trusted rather than feared as a form of self-indulgence. Here the sealed fountain is liberated--feelings, images, fancy may flow free--because of a deep trust in the ultimate goodness of

the source.

William's picture of his sister gives us a clue that Rossetti had within her own experience first-hand knowledge of the kind of emotional stalemate that the Lizzie-and-Laura configuration exemplifies. In view of the widely remarked restrictiveness of the poet's moral outlook, it is to her credit that in "Goblin Market" she presses beyond simplistic moralizing. She recognizes here--more fully than in "The Lowest Room", for example--that mere denial or starvation of the inner Laura is an inadequate solution to the problem of intra-psychic conflict. Laura suffers for her mistakes, but not merely to learn that she should have been exactly like Lizzie. Lizzie, like the older son in the biblical parable of the prodigal son, has a lesson to learn as well, and cloistered virtue must be tested and tempered by experience.

It is a truism of medical lore that before a cure can be effected, the afflicted person must whole-heartedly desire to be restored to health. Sometimes the goal of health must be approached in a paradoxical fashion --through an increase in the severity of the disease until it can be no longer ignored. The illusion of health must give way to the ravages of illness before the process of restoration can commence. This is most assuredly true of disorders of the spirit as well as physical illnesses, as the aforementioned imaginative case history of Deborah Blau forcefully illustrates. Deborah must seek for sanity. She must recognize her inner demons for what they are--alienated fragments of her own psyche--so that their hold on her can be overcome. This happens as she risks the pain of closer contacts with other people, and through the help of her doctor, increases her own self-awareness. What is beautiful and worth cherishing

in Deborah's Yr world must be courageously divested of threatening, magical power over her, and reintegrated in a constructive way with her new outward-looking consciousness of the world.

A similar pattern can be traced in the development of the "Goblin Market" narrative. Initially, self-deception prevails. Then Laura's condition worsens to the extent that concealment from Lizzie is no longer possible. As awareness of the grievous state of affairs deepens, and the true nature of the illness comes to light Lizzie empathizes more and more, an evidence of fuller understanding:

Tender Lizzie could not bear
To watch her sister's cankerous care,
Yet not to share.
(11.299-301)

The means to slake her sister's mortal thirst is within her grasp, but it involves a terrifying risk which she has hitherto avoided at all costs:

She heard the tramp of goblin men,
The voice and stir
Poor Laura could not hear;
Longed to buy fruit to comfort her,
But feared to pay too dear.
(11.307-311)

Her great moment of decision does not come until the maximum amount of damage has been done, short of complete self-destruction. But when Laura seems "knocking at Death's door" the season for retreat is ended abruptly. Courage and love dispel paralyzing fear, and Lizzie braces herself to take whatever risks are necessary, even though they will bring her in contact with the world she distrusts:

Then Lizzie weighed no more
 Better and worse;
 But put a silver penny in her purse,
 Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with
 Clumps of furze
 At twilight, halted by the brook:
 And for the first time in her life
 Began to listen and to look.
 (11.322-328)

Lizzie's encounter with the goblins is as different from Laura's as day is from night, although at the outset there is a deceptive similarity. For all her initial gentleness and seeming vulnerability, she is here to stare down the demonic, not to compromise with it. She has no intention to respect the taboo that demands that goblin fruit must be feasted on under cover of night in a secret place, in accordance with goblin etiquette. Her very mission, to obtain the precious fruit and carry it back to Laura in the daylight world, is a threat to the defensive discreteness of the two worlds of the poem. When the goblins grasp this a sinister change in their mood occurs:

They began to scratch their pates,
 No longer wagging, purring,
 But visibly demurring,
 Grunting and snarling.
 (11.390-393)

Seen in this light, the goblins' aggressive behaviour is in fact a desperate kind of self-defense, a deadly earnest fight for survival, parallel to the hostile attacks made upon Deborah Blau by the perishing gods of her inner schizophrenic Yr kingdom in the last phases of her mental illness. Rossetti's imagery at this point suggests sexual violation:

Their looks were evil.
 Lashing their tails
 They trod and hustled her,
 Elbowed and jostled her,
 Clawed with their nails.
 Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking,
 Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,
 Twitched her hair out by the roots,
 Stamped upon her tender feet,
 Held her hands and squeezed their fruits
 Against her mouth to make her eat.
 (11.432-438)

In the most obvious sense, the goblins are the aggressors, and Lizzie the victim of the "rape"; however, figuratively speaking, the reverse is also true. It is the logic of dream symbolism that is operating here, and in dreams such ambiguities are commonplace. Lizzie is forcibly invading a secret, forbidden place. She is violating the goblin world, and ultimately she succeeds in gaining on her own terms, against the goblins' will, the prize of fruit which they would not sell to her for money. Even in the midst of the fray, the exhilaration of conquest is evident:

Lizzie uttered not a word;
 Would not open lip from lip
 Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
 But laughed in heart to feel the drip
 Of juice that syruped all her face,
 And lodged in dimples of her chin,
 And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.
 (11.432-438)

When the pain and violence of this confrontation are over, and Lizzie hastens home "in a smart, ache, tingle", an important distinction has emerged between the fought-for fruit, and its goblin context. The two, it now appears, are not inseparable. She has gained access to what

is most precious and indeed essential for Laura's recovery, yet she has rejected "goblinness": the distorted, ugly forms which so lately presented themselves in conjunction with the fruit have now dissolved, writhed into the ground, scudded away soundlessly on the gale. She has stared the goblins down, and, in the process, learned that man does not suffer corruption at the hands of agents beseiging him from the exterior. Evil is not something "out there" like the flora and fauna about her. The darkness within is more fearful than the darkness without, and that inner darkness grows when one retreats into a narrow, well-lit chamber of the soul, and remains there, pretending that shadows do not exist.

More about the fruit itself is revealed in the final episode of the narrative. The symbolic implications of the fact that the fruit proves to be its own antidote have teased the minds of more than one commentator. Although the phrase "poison in the blood" is used to describe Laura's ailment, her condition is clearly less like blood-poisoning, food-poisoning, or infection, than it is like a natural hunger or thirst. It is the lack of something for which an appetite or real need exists. That genuine need in Laura could not be realistically or adequately met until the goblins guarding the fruit had been routed once and for all, and an open and harmonious relation restored between the two sisters.

The cure is administered in a startling manner, the eucharistic symbolism of which has often been noted. Lizzie arrives home, covered and dripping with the juices of the fruit:

She cried, 'Laura,' up the garden,
 'Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices

Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
 Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me. . . .
 (11.466-474)

In Lizzie's redemptive gesture of self-giving, physical and spiritual dimensions meet as in the enactment of the sacrament. The expression of her love could hardly take a more sensuous form. Laura responds in kind, with free flowing penitence and concern over what has befallen her sister, amid tears and caresses:

Tears once again
 Refreshed her shrunken eyes.
 Dropping like rain
 After long sultry drouth;
 Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
 She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.
 (11.489-494)

This two-fold meeting and mingling of sense and spirit in a reconciling act is highly significant, since the focus of the whole poem has been a disorder or disharmony in the self which radically separates and alienates the life of the soul from the life of the senses. For such a disease, no treatment could be more appropriate.

The sacrificial character of what is happening comes through very forcefully in this scene. Symbolically, Lizzie's body and the fruit in which it is steeped are intermixed, and Lizzie very graphically offers herself for her sister's nourishment. For Laura's sake she opens herself to a new kind of experience in the world, and reaps for this both pain and a rich reward in Laura's recovery. To live fully is to bargain boldly for what is worth much and can bring great joy, yet not to shrink from taking one's place in the great sacrificial order which all living things

together compose. In the world of generation, living and dying are inseparable and even interdependent, just as this year's wild flowers are fertilized by last autumn's decaying leaves. And this imperfect world, with all its mixed pains and pleasures, is nonetheless holy, a medium in which Spirit expresses itself, and in which our individual spirits grow and are refined and tested. The fruit of experience in this life, however, cannot be plucked at a safe distance, and the pain, the price, avoided. These fruits--some tangible, some spiritual--are accessible to those who are prepared to enter fully into human experience, making themselves vulnerable and risking a great deal. This is the high personal cost of full humanity.

The intensely personal and intimate nature of the payment is aptly symbolized in "Goblin Market" by the fact that the only acceptable currency in which payments commensurate with the worth of the fruit can be made is the human body or its products. Laura rights the balances with a precious golden curl and a tear more rare than pearl. Her reward, because of the inauspicious circumstances of the transaction, is a kind of personal hell. Lizzie's payment and her reward as well are of a higher order. She opens herself, offers herself as a living sacrifice ("Eat me, drink me, love me"), and her reward, although it brings great joy to her, reaches beyond the confines of narrow self-gratification to embrace and redeem Laura. If we consider Lizzie and Laura to be a single personality, the end of the poem still points to a kind of encounter with the world which is holy, even sacramental in character, because it transcends the confines of self-interest. The concluding tableau, which pictures the girls as loving wives and mothers bears this out.

The process of growth or maturation that Lizzie and Laura have undergone does not remain within the category of inner, subjective experience. It transforms their relation to the world at each point of contact. They are now ready for the intimate involvement of married life and child-bearing, for their lives are enriched by love and wisdom as well as piety. Like Margaret singing her sisters home, Laura is able to tell a tale which joins hand to loving hand. Thus the scene is replete with Rossetti's characteristic images of a self-integration which would by implication make possible a more satisfying engagement with the world outside the self. And on this harmonious chord, Rossetti ends the poem which is perhaps her most memorable treatment of the theme which is central to her art.

CONCLUSION

Rossetti's poetry is of an intensely personal character. If to many modern readers her fixed religious beliefs are untenable and baffling, they do not prevent her poems from achieving a poignant universality on the level of feeling: the experience of self-alienation, and the frustrated search for self-acceptance and inner harmony, is by no means restricted to the ascetic Christian.

The myth of self-integration in Rossetti's poetry is expressed through several interrelated sets of images which transcend the formal division of her works into categories such as devotional pieces, secular love poems, children's verse, phantasy narrative and the like. These patterns of images include the mysterious depths of the ocean and its rocky boundary shore; marriage between earthly lovers and its negation in lovers sundered by death, divorce and broken promises; the biblical imagery of earthly bride and Heavenly Bridegroom; and, finally, the different variations on the familial bond of sisterhood. Such imagery provides the medium for Rossetti's exploration of the multi-faceted self and its relationship to the world beyond it.

Looking at poems composed at various points in her life one discovers in Rossetti's work a remarkable thematic consistency. The same images crop up again and again, dramatically articulating the poet's central tensions and conflicts, and suggesting that the events of her adult life, the books she read, the people she encountered, seem hardly to have touched or modified the deep concern which found expression in her art. Yet one is justified in tracing a growing complexity and facility

in Rossetti's use of the sister motif as a structural device from her earliest poems to its culmination in "Goblin Market". Even though this most successful treatment of the theme of self-integration appeared relatively early in her career, she achieved here striking metaphorical vividness and depth, as well as a satisfying resolution of some of the basic tensions which inform much of her art.

The cohesive whole of "Goblin Market" offers an effective fusion of many diverse elements which, as we have seen, recur frequently in other poetic contexts, but here there is a sense of completeness that is often lacking elsewhere. In "Goblin Market" the contrary claims of various sectors of the self are lucidly and imaginatively embodied in the symbolic medium of the narrative, and each receives a full and candid hearing. The real causes of the inner conflict are probed more deeply than in the other sister poems such as the later "Maidensong" and "The Prince's Progress", and the final resolution is truly integrative: it does not ultimately require a total repression or denial of the sensuous-affectionate elements in the personality, the heart's death for the soul's life. Instead, the natural affections find their appropriate place within the balanced personality after experience and self-giving love have tempered innocence, and the maturity thus gained makes possible a loving engagement with what is beyond the self.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious, 87.

²Woolf, The Second Common Reader, 219.

³Gosse, Critical Kit-kats, 148.

⁴Gosse, 148.

⁵"Pure and Impure Poetry" first appeared in Kenyon Review V, 1943.

⁶Woolf, 220.

⁷Weathers, "The Sisterhood of Self", Victorian Poetry, III, 81-89.

⁸Woolf, 216.

Chapter I

¹All quotations from the poems of Christina Rossetti are taken from The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, edited by William Michael Rossetti. They will be identified by line reference, and, where necessary, title, in parenthesis, immediately following each quotation.

²Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious, 128.

³Rossetti, Speaking Likenesses, 28.

Chapter II

¹De la Mare, Christina Rossetti, 85.

²Henry Vaughan, "They are all gone into the world of light!", 11.5-8.

³Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Hurrahing in Harvest", 11.5-8.

⁴Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, 90.

⁵Luke 13, 6-9.

⁶My attention was drawn to Rilke's sonnet by Herbert Marcuse. It is quoted in his discussion on the significance of the Orpheus figure, in Eros and Civilization, 162.

⁷Battiscombe, Christina Rossetti, 23.

⁸Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man", Man and his Symbols, 124.

⁹Jung, Psyche and Symbol, 105.

¹⁰Franz, "The Process of Individuation", Man and his Symbols, 220.

¹¹Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, 166.

Chapter III

¹De la Mare, Christina Rossetti, p.87.

²Sing-song was compiled by Rossetti and published as a separate volume in 1872, with illustrations by Arthur Hughes, the well known children's illustrator.

³"Goblin Market" was the title poem in Rossetti's first commercially published collection which appeared in 1862, although it was written earlier, in 1859.

⁴Rossetti, W.M., Note to "The Lowest Room", in The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, p.460. All subsequent references to notes on the Rossetti poems are to those found in this edition and will be cited as follows: Rossetti, W.M., Notes, p.--.

⁵Rossetti, W.M., Notes, pp.460-461.

⁶A further evidence of Rossetti's frustration at being condemned to the limiting role of feminine passivity prescribed even by the so-called nonconformist men of her own family connection, is manifested in

the ironic and rather bitter tone of the prose story Speaking Likenesses. One of the games at a nightmarish birthday party is vividly suggestive of woman as helpless object in a male-oriented world:

The next game called for was Self Help. In this no adventitious aids were tolerated, but each boy depended exclusively on his own resources. Thus pins were forbidden: but every natural advantage, as a quill or fishhook, might be utilized to the utmost.

(Don't look shocked, dear Ella, at my choice of words; but remember that my birthday party is being held in the Land of Nowhere. Yet who knows whether something not altogether unlike it has not ere now taken place in the Land of Somewhere? Look at home, children.)

The boys were players, the girls were played (if I may be allowed such a phrase). . . . (Speaking Likenesses, 35-36.)

⁷Weathers, "The Sisterhood of Self", Victorian Poetry III, 85.

⁸Weathers, 83, 86.

⁹Curran, "The Lyric Voice of Christina Rossetti", Victorian Poetry IX, 287-299.

¹⁰Curran, 288.

¹¹Packer, Christina Rossetti, 142.

¹²Packer, 144.

¹³Weathers, 84.

¹⁴MacDonald, The Princess and the Goblin, pp.11-13.

¹⁵Rossetti, W.M., Memoir, The Poetical Works, lxvi.

¹⁶Rossetti, W.M., Memoir, lxvii-lxviii.

¹⁷Rossetti, W.M., Memoir, lxviii.

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